

THE CABINET AND WAR



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THE CABINET AND WAR

The Alien Immigrant

BY

MAJOR W. EVANS-GORDON, M.P.

(*Lately a member of the Royal Commission on
Alien Immigration.*)

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THE CABINET AND WAR

By
MAJOR W. EVANS-GORDON, M.P.



LONDON
ARCHIBALD CONSTABLE & CO. LTD.
1904



BUTLER & TANNER,
THE SELWOOD PRINTING WORKS,
FROME, AND LONDON.

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NEW YORK

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PREFACE

THE name of my friend Mr. Godfrey Burchett ought, perhaps, to appear on the title-page of this book, for he has collaborated with me upon it throughout. But it is his opinion that the criticisms and suggestions here made should, owing to the subject with which they deal, come before the public on the sole authority of a soldier and member of the legislature, and I am entirely willing to accept full responsibility for them.

W. E. G.

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CHAPTER I

THE OLD ARMY AND THE NEW

NO one can be reasonably surprised or justly indignant if the British taxpayer reflects upon schemes of War Office reform with an unbelieving mind. The War Office offers a case of chronic reform. Committee after Committee has sat and reported, remedy after remedy has been applied, change after change has been made, and hitherto the taxpayer has always discovered in the end that he has once more been spending his money on a system which must be abolished in the interests of national security.

This is a discouraging experience. And when the Royal Commission on the War in South Africa showed that our methods had, in 1899, reproduced with a singular precision the blunders that appalled our fathers at the time of the Crimean War, many people concluded in despair that capacity for military administration was foreign to the British character. Nevertheless the Committee of Three, though it was neither composed of our most prominent soldiers nor representative of the Army, obtained a great measure of public confidence. The way in which it went to work convinced people that it was not

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influenced by those undisclosed considerations which so often tend to attune evidence and shape Reports, and the reception given to its recommendations by military experts proved that the vital issue had been raised at last, and that the question before the country was whether we were or were not to have in future a consistent, reasoned system which would work in war.

Why have we had to wait so long for such a system? The King's dominions form the greatest empire in the world, we have a constant succession of little wars, and are accustomed to the near prospect, once or twice in a decade, of a collision with a great Power. Other nations which we may have to meet in the field have long since put their military organization on a scientific footing, and Germany, which has done the work most thoughtfully, thoroughly and patiently, owes its success against Austria and France in very great part to the methodical accomplishment of that task. But in our War Office chaos continued year after year, scientific administration was unknown, and common-sense was disregarded.

It must be remembered that the governing factor in the evolution of most Continental armies has had no counterpart in England. That factor was the experience gained during the Napoleonic invasions. The old feudal organization for fighting purposes disappeared in those immense catastrophies. The loss of life, the humiliation, the moral and physical suffering of the conquered nations taught a lesson which has never been forgotten.

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They became accustomed to the idea of the whole people under arms to defend its territory and its homes. And if they considered it the man's duty to pay the "blood-tax," they expected in return that those who ruled and led the national army should use without wasting, and to the best advantage the money and material which the community devoted to the insurance of its interests and its honour. They had learned in the hardest school, and they discarded antiquated, ill-assorted methods and regulations. I do not say that this was done simultaneously and with a logical consistency by the great European Powers. They advanced at different times and on somewhat different lines. But the cause of the advance was a similar experience and a possible antagonism, which might lead to a renewal of it.

The British people played an important part in the Napoleonic wars. But our army in the Peninsula was essentially an expeditionary force, and the valuable lessons which were learned in Spain and Portugal had very little effect at headquarters. The brief campaign which ended at Waterloo certainly gave the home authorities no incentive to reform their administration.

The Boer war has to some extent performed for us the office which invasion and defeat performed for Continental states. At last we are—seemingly at all events—ready to profit by the experience of others and to adopt those military methods which are demonstrably necessary to render our army efficient in the field. The Committee of Three have

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shown themselves root-and-branch reformers, and the long era of tinkering and make-believe is at an end. If action is taken upon the whole and not upon a part of their recommendations, if indulgence is not weakly accorded to susceptibilities which ought to be sacrificed in the interests of the country, if, above all, sufficient time is allowed for the new system to take root and develop, we shall at length possess as perfect a military weapon as the nation can produce under its present conditions.

But there is a word of warning which it would be dishonest not to utter. Political considerations sent the French army marching *sous la pluie, dans la boue, à l'extermination*¹ at Sedan. Political considerations sent Baratieri with 15,000 men against the 120,000 Abyssinians armed with modern rifles and provided with modern artillery, whom Menelek mustered to meet them at Adowa.² *Political considerations, not War Office blunders, were the real cause of our unreadiness in the summer of 1899,* just as political considerations made us too late to save Gordon at Khartoum. Under the new scheme the absolute control of the politician over the soldier is not diminished ; it is increased. The movements of the military body, alike in preparation and in action, are governed by the political brain. And we are making a dangerous experiment which is without a precedent ; for the new Thinking Department, the Prime Minister's Committee, which is to co-ordinate national defence, has been

¹ Zola, *La Débâcle*.

² Augustus Wylde, *Modern Abyssinia*.

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brought directly under the influence of party politics.

It may be said that in the past divided responsibility involved us in those misfortunes which were not caused by political miscalculations. To-day we see the Government supplied with *two* advisory bodies of different composition, which may be at variance. One is in direct and constant touch with the Prime Minister, who must be "personally committed to its policy." The other has as its president, the Secretary of State for War, and will "decide all questions of military policy."

In 1899 Lord Lansdowne paved the South African inferno with his good intentions because he was the victim of divided counsels. Can it be said that the new scheme supplies advisers who will speak with one voice and will never be deflected from the single-minded consideration of military requirements by those fatal "political exigencies" which made the safety of the Empire dependent on the blunders of the Boers five years ago?

The following passage in the first letter of the Committee of Three to the Prime Minister will govern our whole system of naval and military preparation in the future. It would scarcely be possible to exaggerate its importance.

"In considering the constitution of the Defence Committee itself, we are fully alive to the vital necessity for having as its invariable President the Prime Minister of the day. Under our political institutions, based on the authority of a Parliament with traditions like ours, no body of experts, however highly trained and qualified,

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would carry sufficient weight and authority to give practical effect to their conclusions, unless the Prime Minister, in whom governing power is vested, were present at their deliberations, and personally committed to their policy.

“If, therefore—and we assume this to be an essential condition—the Prime Minister is to preside over the Defence Committee, we fully realize the importance of leaving to him absolute discretion in the selection and variation of its members; but we would venture to suggest the vital importance of giving to that institution, yet in its infancy, as powerful a sanction for continuity and permanence as may be consistent with the retention, by the Prime Minister, of perfect freedom of action in regard to its component parts.”

Every one will respect the Committee's appeal for continuity of policy. It is that which has contributed in chief measure to make the German General Staff so powerful a factor in organizing victory. But the Kaiser's General Staff is a military institution which is neither dependent upon, nor affected by, the political changes and chances of the hour. Would such continuity be possible under a succession of Governments, any one of which may be pledged to reverse, and all of which will probably be pledged to modify, the financial and military policy of the preceding Cabinet? Is there any person who can believe that Mr. Gladstone would have “personally committed” himself to the policy of a body whose members had been appointed by Lord Beaconsfield, or that any Premier who is all for peace and retrenchment and small armaments will allow himself and his colleagues in Parliament to be overruled by the representations of men who

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owe their position to a former Prime Minister's adoption of a "forward" Imperial policy?

Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman dissented from his colleagues on the Hartington Commission, who had recommended the creation of a General Staff. He wrote, "I do not see that any case of necessity has been made out." Recently he derided the utterances of the Committee of Three as combining "the pontifical and the hysterical." Is it conceivable that there should be continuity between the policy which Sir Henry, under the surveillance of Mr. John Morley and Mr. Lloyd-George, would impose upon the Committee of Defence, and that which would be regarded as essential to the strength and safety of the Empire by a Government which cordially accepted the advice of an energetic General Staff, and did not fail "to think imperially"?

Complete Cabinet control of military action and expenditure is the corollary of Parliamentary control of the Army, and any proposal to abolish or even modify it is outside the range of practical politics. But it may be possible to remedy one of the worst evils to which the system has given rise. It is beyond question that the interaction of our political and military machinery left the Empire exposed to ruinous risks in 1899. Yet no one could justly be held responsible. The Army Board, which had sat throughout the summer to consider the necessary preparations for a campaign, demanded money which the political chiefs refused to grant in time. How can one blame the Army

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Board for the unpreparedness of the force in the field? The Secretary of State for War associated himself with the decision of his colleagues in the Cabinet not to grant the funds when they were asked for. But he considered that he carried out the plans of the Commander-in-Chief in an adequate manner. The members of the Royal Commission exonerated the Secretary of State, though Lord Esher was of opinion, with regard to our defective stores, that "either he was culpable of neglect, or that he was in ignorance of the facts." Parliament has acquitted the whole Cabinet. How, then, is it possible to fix responsibility on Lord Lansdowne and his colleagues?

The Commander-in-Chief remains as the possible scapegoat. Lord Wolseley, who held the office during the critical months, was, officially, the "principal adviser" of the Secretary of State for War. But there were four subordinate advisers (not including Sir Redvers Buller), who had access to Lord Lansdowne, and could offer independent counsels. The position did not conduce to resolute and consistent action. Nevertheless, the Secretary of State believed that he did finally satisfy the requirements of those appointed to guide his judgment in military matters. The Commander-in-Chief, at least, did not agree with that opinion. He had urged the adoption of more forcible measures, and the dispatch of considerable reinforcements at an earlier date, and held that his plans were frustrated by delay. Certainly his proposals were set aside again and again while diplomatic negotia-

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tions were proceeding. Time is "of the essence" of military preparations if they are to be successful. Can one rightly condemn the Commander-in-Chief?

In fact, though the Empire was nearly brought to ruin, and though the danger might have been averted by a due regard to the warnings and advice of the Intelligence Department within the War Office, responsibility everywhere lapses. The politicians misunderstood the soldiers and did not realize the military necessities of the situation, and the soldiers were thwarted by the politicians.

What is the remedy for such defects in our system? Clearly, it is that responsibility should be plainly defined, and that military advice should be moulded by military considerations only and not by political influences. But under the system proposed by Lord Esher and his colleagues we have a Defence Committee with the widest powers, presided over by the Premier and composed of members who are his nominees. It is inevitable, in the long run, that they should support his general military—and, in this respect, his financial—policy. They cannot overrule the Cabinet nor be in constant conflict with it. Concurrent authority exists in the General Staff represented by the First Military Member of the Army Council. He may or may not be swayed by the considerations that prevail in the Defence Committee, and his purely military judgments may or may not be in agreement with those of the Prime Minister's advisory body. If they are not, which of the two authorities is to prevail? Here again

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we have divided responsibility, and the politician, left to choose, will be exonerated if he chooses wrongly. Moreover, the military requirements which should govern preparation for war are, so to speak, a fixed quantity, and ought not to be made to conform to political convenience.

I venture to offer a suggestion on this subject with all deference, and with a full consciousness of the very slight justification which I can claim for putting forward a proposal as an alternative to the recommendation made by the Committee of Three. Would it not be advisable to remove the Service section of the Defence Committee from contact with party politics altogether, and make it a purely naval and military body with assessors from the Colonial and India Offices and from other Departments when necessary? Should not the military portion of the work of co-ordination which it is to perform be done by a member or members delegated by the great General Staff and subordinate to it? Then in this country, as in Germany, the study of military problems and the maturing of plans of campaign on land would be undertaken by the General Staff, and by it alone, continuously and consistently, without regard to the results of elections. And if the Empire were within measurable distance of war, as it was in the summer of 1899, the Cabinet would have recourse to the General Staff and would receive from it advice, which had at no period been developed under the influence of political hopes and fears. If the Cabinet rejected the plans, or so modified them or

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delayed their execution as to vitiate them, the clear responsibility for ensuing disasters would rest upon the Cabinet. It is a responsibility which most politicians would sedulously avoid. And if the plans proved faulty, the responsibility would rest fully upon the General Staff, and could not be reduced to unreality by a disclosure of the halting and unwilling action of the Government.

CHAPTER II

THE OLD SYSTEM AT WORK

THE living value of the evidence given before the Royal Commission on the War in South Africa does not consist in the fact that it proved that we failed grossly and dangerously at the commencement, but in the fact that it showed *why* we failed. It is undeniable that our whole military system broke down under the strain of the operations. It is of course true that these were, after our first reverses, conducted upon a scale for which the Government and the War Office had had no authority to prepare in time of peace. But it is equally true that the worst and most blameworthy failures occurred soon after the opening of hostilities, when the force in the field was such, both in numbers and constitution, as we were supposed always to have in readiness and in a state of efficiency. To discover the causes of the breakdown, it is necessary briefly to review the working of the old military and political system.

When the conference between Sir Alfred Milner and President Kruger at Bloemfontein came to an end in June, 1899, war between this country and the Transvaal was a probability of the near future.

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The view which her late Majesty's Government took—officially—of the situation at the time has been clearly described by Lord Lansdowne, who was then Secretary of State for War. Speaking in the House of Lords on January 31, 1900, he said :—

“ I believe that every member of her Majesty's Government in the summer of last year realized perfectly well that war in the end might prove inevitable ; but we did not believe that it was inevitable ; and so long as by any action consistent with our self-respect we could avoid that war we were anxious to avoid it, knowing as we did that it would prove a very serious and a very costly war—costly not only in treasure, but costly, I mean, in the loss of precious lives which cannot be replaced.”

According to Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, Mr. Chamberlain thus described to him the Government's view of the situation. “ You need not be alarmed,” he said in the course of a confidential conversation in June, 1899 ; “ there will be no fighting ; we know that those fellows, the Boers, will not fight. We are playing a game of bluff.” Mr. Chamberlain did not agree that he had used the word “ bluff.” When there are two divergent recollections of an utterance, everybody may choose the one which suits him, and that course has been generally followed in this instance. The matter is not of great importance ; for if there was a game of bluff at all it was of the mildest kind, and the constant complaint of all the soldiers concerned in the preparation for war was that they could not induce the Cabinet to take adequate measures in time.

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The Liberal Opposition recently hastened to reveal the fact that, in the presence of a great Imperial crisis, they declined to sink party differences and co-operate with the Government even to the extent of rendering mobile and efficient the garrison then in South Africa, and of reinforcing the troops on the spot to a point at which the safety of the Colonies might then have been secured. It is attributable to this unpatriotic attitude that Mr. Kruger believed himself to be facing a disunited people.

In the early part of the summer of 1899 Lieutenant-General Sir William Butler was in command at the Cape. In regard to the possibility of avoiding hostilities in South Africa he was substantially in agreement with the Home Government.

War, then, both in England and at the Cape, was regarded, perhaps with certain mental reservations at home, as one of the alternatives in sight, but not as the necessary outcome of the negotiations with Mr. Kruger. The Queen's Government had faith in diplomatic action.

"Throughout the summer of last year (1899) the negotiations were proceeding, and proceeding, on the whole, hopefully. We received from the South African Republic one proposal after another, each of them apparently more hopeful and more encouraging, as to a satisfactory issue; and I think we are not to blame if, while these negotiations were going on, we shrank from such measures, as, for example, the calling out of the Reserves or the sending of large expeditionary forces, which could only be intended for aggressive purposes."—Lord Lansdowne in the House of Lords, January 31, 1900.

It was assumed that the Transvaal Government

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was offering concessions in good faith (Lord Lansdowne, 21200), and a perfectly definite policy was adopted to meet the case.

“We were determined that we would take no steps which might have the effect of precipitating war with the South African Republic. We believed that it was perfectly possible to draw an intelligible line between those military measures which were necessary for the purpose of securing our colonies in South Africa and those other measures which might be necessary should an invasion of the two republics be determined upon. While negotiations were still in progress we determined to restrict ourselves to those purely protective measures which seemed to us sufficient for the purpose and which, in our belief, were not calculated to provoke a rupture of the negotiations which were proceeding.”—Lord Lansdowne in the House of Lords, Jan. 31, 1900.

The General commanding at the Cape was in agreement with the Home Government in regard to the ruling principle of their policy.

“To my mind, the minute there was the least indication of the Imperial Government coming in in front of, or behind, that party (the party of the Raid), then there would be a serious state of things. Until then there was, to my mind, no probability—no possibility—of an invasion. That was the state of my mind at the time, and I wished to point it out before final decisions were arrived at. ‘Let us get our house in order, let us get our stores and our Staff, let us at least know what you are going to do.’ You will find urgent telegrams home a few days later asking for a B Staff, as we were being robbed already in contracts, and I said, ‘Let us make such preliminary arrangements as are necessary to meet the altered condition of affairs if these decisions are arrived at.’”—Sir William Butler (13500).

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Obviously, then, a course of conduct was taken by the Government which in no way ran counter to the advice of the officer in chief command at the Cape. It was, in sum, that nothing should be done in South Africa to provoke a declaration of war while negotiations were in progress, and that adequate measures should be taken to protect the colonies if hostilities proved unavoidable. The military organization of the country was not directly concerned with the diplomatic side of this policy. But it was directly concerned in the measures taken to safeguard Cape Colony and Natal.

There had been abundant time for preparation. In a letter from the War Office to Sir William Butler written in December, 1898, war was spoken of as "impending." (Quoted in *Minutes of Evidence*, vol. ii. p. 91.) Sir William commented on that letter in a communication which he addressed to the Adjutant-General on February 7, 1902. He said :—

"In the War Office letter of that date lay my principal difficulty, for the following reasons—

"It recommended to me, both in Natal and in the Cape Colony, the initial occupation of advanced positions, the adoption of which would, to my mind, have involved the earliest and the most complete initial disasters.

"It pressed upon me seizing all the bridges of the Orange River between Cape Colony and the Orange Free State, as well as Van Reenan's Pass and other advanced positions in Natal, by the small force under my command. I had, therefore, not only to write a scheme of defence, but I had to argue it against the War Office proposals."

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It is, however, possible that these proposals did not represent the mature opinion of the War Office authorities, for some months later Sir William was told, "It is difficult to unravel the various directions sent to you from the different branches here" (the War Office), "each without the knowledge of the other branches concerned." And again, "There has been a good deal of confusion at headquarters from various branches having taken action without reference to the Commander-in-Chief's Department."—*Minutes of Evidence*, vol. ii. p. 91.

The Right Hon. St. John Brodrick, in the course of his evidence before the Royal Commission, said :—

"We realize, of course, that it is impossible to prepare schemes for offence and defence of the British Empire as you may for a nation that has only got two frontiers on the Continent of Europe. But at the same time I think, apart from the experience of the War, the Commission will feel that a great deal required to be done in that respect which has not been done" (21705).

That opinion does not seem to have been formed in 1899. Sir William Butler had been Acting Administrator in Cape Colony in December, 1898, and January and part of February, 1899 (13382). He said in the course of his evidence :—

"As soon as I was freed from my civil labours, which were very continuous at that time, owing to the strained state of political relationship, the killing of Edgar and the rest of it, I set about the large question that letter" (the communication of December 21, 1898, from the War Office) "involved, that is to say, the pre-

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paration of a Defence Scheme for South Africa. I started, I think, three or four days after I handed over the civil duties to Sir Alfred, now Lord, Milner. . . . The first purpose in my mind was to examine the frontier, which, I need scarcely tell the Commission, is an extensive one. It was something like 1,500 miles, and was at its nearest place 700 miles distant from where I then was. However, I decided to visit the Natal frontier, and I went to Natal in the end of February, and I visited the northern angle of Natal and Ladysmith and Glencoe, and about sixty miles south of the Tugela, and then I returned to Cape Town. I intended to visit the other part of the frontier, that large section between Mafeking and Basutoland, a distance of some 700 or 800 miles, later, and then to draw up the Defence Scheme and reply. In June I received a telegram asking me for this Defence Scheme which I had formulated in my own mind in case any circumstances should arise to call for action, but I did not wish to commit myself to paper until I had visited the whole of the frontier, which was a very detailed business. Meantime, unfortunately, the state of public feeling became so acute that the movements of any body of troops, much more the General commanding, was a matter of some consequence. It was not easy to go to the frontier without exciting suspicion, but in the beginning of June I placed the detailed Defence Scheme in the hands of the War Office" (13406).

Mr. Brodrick considered that the work might have been done much more expeditiously. In a letter to General Butler, dated January 3, 1902, he wrote :—

"The War Office letter of December 21, 1898, impressed on you the possibility of hostilities with the Transvaal and the Free State, and besides assisting you by a concise recapitulation of the main physical features of the frontier, called your attention to secret publications

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which contained accurate information regarding the military forces of the Republics and the more important strategical points. These publications were in your possession, you had personally the advantage, acquired by previous service in the country, of a general knowledge of the military geography of South Africa and its methods of warfare, and it was open to you to despatch staff officers to examine any particular localities about which you desired further detailed information. Under these conditions the Secretary of State for War is unable to admit that a general officer of your standing and experience needed five and a half months to decide what dispositions he would make to meet a contingency which might arise at very short notice. It seems to Mr. Brodrick that the circumstances under which you were asked to consider your dispositions were at least as favourable to a decision as those under which a general officer in command in the field may frequently be called upon to determine his plan of operations within a few days or hours."—*Evidence*, vol. ii. p. 96.

Sir William Butler's criticism of these remarks took the following form :—

"I respectfully submit that there is no analogy whatever between the two cases cited.

"The misconception arises from a confusion of ideas between the plan or forecast of war, known as strategy, and the operations which involve immediate action, called tactics.

"A glance at the defence scheme for England—which has been for many years in preparation, and is not yet complete—will show that a scheme of defence for even a small island is not to be confounded with the operations which a General in the field may be called upon to determine in a few days or hours.

"To the suggestion that I might have made use of staff officers for the purpose of visiting various parts of the

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frontier, I reply that I was not disposed to deal at second hand with this important question, even had staff officers been available ; but there were none.”—*Evidence*, vol. ii. p. 97.

In England the last word upon military matters of all kinds, in war as in peace, is with the politicians, and it is well to understand clearly how great a divergence of views there may be between them and the soldiers who have the responsibility of acting, but very incomplete control over the choice of plans. And in this instance General Butler had no reason to suppose, when he was devising his scheme, that the Home Government thought the contingency of war “ might arise at very short notice.”

In the latter part of June, 1899, Sir William received a letter from the War Office which contained the following phrase : “ Without entering into any close consideration of the political situation, we cannot shut our eyes to the fact that the possibility of war in South Africa has not yet been eliminated ” (13425). But the policy of the Department up to that time was thus described by General Butler in his evidence before the Royal Commission : “ We had been retrenching, as I have already stated to the Commission. My proposals for the acquisition of a large farm for remounts, drill facilities, hospital accommodation, and ordnance stores were negatived ; our reserve men—trained men—were taken away from South Africa. A battalion of infantry which had been at Ladysmith for two years and knew all the surrounding country had been removed to India ; the experienced

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officer who had held command at Ladysmith had been recently recalled to England. There was no General in Natal" (13488). Moreover, said Sir William Butler, "I find the small reserve of rifles in my ordnance store at Cape Town at this period thus referred to: 'There has been a misunderstanding as to the reserve of rifles sent out, and you have a good many more than can possibly be needed'" (13425). "It was a very small supply of 500 or 1,000 perhaps" (13542). Naturally these measures and observations did not suggest to the Commander at the Cape that the Home Government considered that a state of war "might arise at very short notice."

Few results of our former system of management were more unfortunate than the impression formed by more than one military man in a position of great responsibility, that the Government did not duly take into its confidence those whom it placed in authority. Sir William Butler thus described his position:—

"In my despatch of July 4 I stated the circumstances under which I had come out from England without instructions of any kind in either civil or military matters, nor was it deemed necessary to send me any instructions after my arrival in the country. Indeed, the obscurity in which I found myself in this respect was more than merely negative.

"Asking in my office at Cape Town, some time after my arrival, for an official book in which my predecessor had kept copies of his confidential correspondence with the War Office, I ascertained that this record had been destroyed. I then found that some seventy or eighty pages of this book had been torn out, and I subsequently

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discovered that this action had not been taken because of any request made by General Goodenough before his death, nor at the instance of the widow or executors of the late General.¹ One other instance before I quit this somewhat painful subject. Under date August 3, 1899, the following telegram can be read in the official Blue Book: 'Propriety of moving troops nearer to frontier, so as to watch Laing's Nek, is being considered by her Majesty's Government. If it be desired to garrison Laing's Nek, would Colonial troops be sent with British?' This telegram, the execution of which would undoubtedly have produced immediate hostilities, was never communicated to the General commanding in South Africa, although two months previous to its date he had officially recorded his opinion that the position proposed for occupation was, for a variety of reasons given, 'a dangerous one.' I do not think I need pursue this subject further.

"Looking back from the present time to those early months of 1899, the sole sign of impending changes which I can trace is to be found in the obscure movement of the families of some of the officials; the sudden sales of the racing studs of the chief financial millionaires in Johannesburg; and the arrival in South Africa from England of the most noted persons connected with the Jameson Raid of 1895-6. The last-named immigration will be found mentioned in my despatches of June, 1899. But who could have imagined that the persons to whom I have referred could have been the recipients of any information as to a coming war which had not been communicated to the General in command in South Africa?" (13425).

It is not my purpose to defend General Butler's

¹ It has since been stated that these pages were destroyed because they were believed to be infected by the plague *bacillus*. One cannot help wondering how that *bacillus* selects particular pages in a book as its habitat.

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conduct or endorse his statements. I quote his words because they supply one of the many instances in which our soldiers felt themselves out of touch with their political chiefs.

In order to understand the military situation at the Cape at the time it is necessary to bear in mind what the General commanding there could and what he could not do. "The King's Regulations are that an officer commanding on the spot, if he is asked for a Scheme of Defence, submits it in relation to the troops which he has at his disposal in his command" (13432). This paralyzing instruction absolutely precluded Sir William Eutler from preparing a Scheme of Defence which would be applicable to the circumstances of war. He could only make dispositions for the use of his garrison in his plans; he could not allow for the reinforcements which would be sent out in the event of hostilities. Moreover, as he told the Royal Commission, "I had no power to spend a £5 note" (13489).

With regard to forces and armaments he said: "I had a very small staff; I think I had an Assistant Adjutant-General, a Commissariat officer, an Ordnance officer, an Engineer and Artillery officer, all fully occupied with their respective duties" (13537). There was "an entire absence of modern guns in South Africa except in Natal" (13539). "In Cape Colony I had only the old seven-pounder guns" (13540).

At Ladysmith "there were eighteen modern guns for two years before the war begun" (13541).

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“The total establishments of the Regular forces in South Africa for the year 1895 amounted to 3,699 all ranks. . . . During the three years before the war, however, certain reinforcements were despatched, so that on August 1, 1899, the garrison included 3 Cavalry regiments, 3 Field batteries, 1 Mounted battery, 2 companies Royal Garrison Artillery, 6½ battalions Infantry, besides Engineer units, or, in all, a total fighting force of 8,500 men” (Appendix Vol. p. 14). The actual force, therefore, to which Sir William Butler’s scheme applied was between 3,699 and 8,500 men. *Could any circumstances prove more clearly than these the need—in spite of Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman’s dictum—of a great thinking and co-ordinating Department, such as Continental Powers possess under the name of the General Staff?*

Moreover, as late as June, 1899, these battalions “had not, as battalions in India have, regimental transport, and, therefore, they were in a sense counters and not current coin until they were given mobility.” Influenced by “earnest representations on the necessity of increasing the garrison,” the Government “sanctioned the provision of the regimental transport which was necessary to make this garrison an effective force. The sanction was given on June 27” (Rt. Hon. George Wyndham, M.P., in the House of Commons, Oct. 21, 1899). Mr. Chamberlain pointed out at Birmingham on the day when the expenditure was authorized (June 27, 1899) that “in the course of the past fifteen years

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we have been four times on the verge of war with the Transvaal." As far back as 1898 the Colonial Office had "during the last eighteen months, in official letters addressed to the War Office, repeatedly drawn attention to the unsatisfactory condition of political affairs in South Africa and to the necessity for the Imperial troops being ready for a sudden emergency" (Major Altham of the Intelligence Department, quoted on p. 12 of the Report of the Commissioners). In view of these facts one fears to approach the question whether our garrisons in other places are "in a sense counters and not current coin." But it is at least clear that if Mr. Chamberlain were playing a "game of bluff" he saw the importance of being ready and able to act in earnest.

Sir William Butler's plan of defence came, naturally, under two heads. In Cape Colony he "never proposed to hold the frontier. The whole gist of my dispatch," he said, "was falling back" (13455). He considered that he had enough troops to cover Cape Town (13456). He proposed to distribute them in certain entrenched positions, and hoped that they would hold in check the Boer forces until reinforcements arrived from England and India. He was asked (13459): "Surely if the Boers had descended with 20,000 men they could have masked your three battalions and marched into Cape Town?" The answer was, "Certainly; no matter what you did, at any moment you might have that state of things if the Boers came on in overwhelming force." Again, "Sup-

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posing you had been Commander of the Boer forces and made up your mind to descend upon Cape Town, was there any force anywhere between Cape Town and the frontier that could have held you ? ”

“ No ; they would have cut the communications, as they did later when there was ten times that force in the country ” (13461). “ Cape Town itself could have been defended by the fleet ” (13462).

It is important to bear these points in mind, inasmuch as Lord Lansdowne adopted the policy of avoiding provocative military precautions and trusting to the garrisons “ *because we were told by our military advisers that in the interim the Colonies were not exposed to any serious danger. We were led to believe that during that period of three months* ” (before reinforcements could take the field after hostilities began) “ no serious harm would come to the Colonies.”—Lord Lansdowne (21210).

On July 4, Sir William Butler, after an interview with the High Commissioner, wrote to the Home Government offering his resignation. On August 10 it was accepted by cable (13624).

He was succeeded in the command of the forces at the Cape by General Sir F. W. Forestier-Walker, who arrived at Cape Town and entered upon his duties on September 6, 1899. The following passage is quoted from the evidence which he gave before the Royal Commission :—

“ Q. When you arrived, you had no definite information as to any outbreak of war ?

A. None whatever.

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Q. You had no instructions when you came out in September to meet any emergency ?

A. I had no instructions whatever. I was told, of course, to report fully home, which I did accordingly by cablegram.

Q. But in taking up your command at the Cape at that moment you simply succeeded as in the ordinary course ?

A. Yes, I succeeded Sir William Butler in time of peace practically.

Q. Without any distinct or special instructions from home ?

A. I had no distinct or special instructions from home.

Q. You were not instructed to consider any scheme of defence of the Colonies, or anything of that kind ?

A. No ; but I naturally, on arrival, as any General would be bound to do, went into the question of defence. Sir William Butler had reported shortly before ; he had also made proposals for a frontier defence of the Colony with the force that then existed, and practically for the defence of Natal. I wrote home that so far as I could see those views were sound, and that I did not think I could improve upon them with the force that I then had. That was for the occupation of the frontier posts, Naauwpoort, Stormberg, and so on.

Q. That was dealing with the matter in the way in which these defence schemes are dealt with, namely, with the existing garrison ?

A. Yes."—*Evidence*, vol. ii. 13657 seq.

At this time

"all the troops in South Africa had been provided with complete regimental transport, but there were no field auxiliary services such as bearer companies, field hospitals, or ammunition columns.

"For some time past the authorities had been urged to purchase horses and mules in the Transvaal and

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Orange Free State, large numbers of which were available ; but, probably owing to the fear of rendering the political situation more acute, leave could not be obtained to buy more animals than were needed for the forces then in the country.

“ As to the actual state of affairs and the imminence of war practically nothing was known beyond the reports which appeared in the daily papers, nor was it known, should hostilities break out, what part the Staff and garrison of Cape Colony would take, nor where the expeditionary force would land. Intelligence officers, however, had reported on various sites which had been selected as bases and advanced depots, and, *provided that the troops, a scheme of operations and a staff of officers were forthcoming*, it would not have been difficult to arrange for the needs of an expeditionary force.

“ I had been informed of the constitution of the force which it was proposed to send from India to Natal ; and shortly after my arrival I received the intelligence that four battalions from the Mediterranean were about to be dispatched to South Africa—two for Natal and two for the Cape. I gathered from the general indications given that, in case of war, the troops would advance through Natal to the Transvaal.”—Sir F. Forestier-Walker, vol. ii., Appendix F. p. 590.

On the arrival of Sir George White at Cape Town on October 3, 1899, the command in Natal was taken over by him (13687). On September 29 Sir F. W. Forestier-Walker had been appointed General Officer Commanding the Lines of Communication under Sir Redvers Buller. His control, from the time when Lord Roberts arrived in Bloemfontein, was limited to Cape Colony, and he left South Africa in April, 1901 (13637-8).

In view of the fact that hostilities commenced

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on October 13, when an armoured train proceeding to Mafeking was attacked and derailed at Kraipan and Boer forces entered Natal (Appendix Vol. p. 7), it is important to bear in mind the following extracts from General Forestier-Walker's evidence :—

“The first information I received that it was intended to land the Army Corps in Cape Colony and that I, with my staff, was to have command of the Lines of Communication was from a telegram sent me by General Buller, *September 29.*”—*Evidence*, vol. ii. p. 590.

Colonel Baden-Powell

“asked for modern guns. The stores at Cape Town did not then contain a single modern weapon for such a purpose. Application was made to the Admiral at Simons Town, who supplied a list of spare guns in store ; none of these were of any use for the object required, and eventually two obsolete seven-pounder R.M.L. guns were discovered by the Ordnance Department and dispatched northwards.”—*Ib.*

“In the first instance I wired home to ask for a certain number of officers, and I was allowed to keep some of those that Sir George White brought out. I kept three—one of whom I appointed to Port Elizabeth, one to East London, and one I sent up to De Aar. Afterwards certain officers were sent out and handed over to me, but there was no special organization for the lines of communication, and I certainly thought that would be arranged for at home, and it was very much wanted.

Q. But that was not done ?

A. No ; and that of course rendered us very short-handed at the base for a considerable time ; we had not an officer to send.

Q. How did you supply the want ?

A. They sent out a certain number of officers after-

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wards, and I appointed them just as I best could. . . . I was under the impression that when they found at home that war was almost a certainty *they would send out an organized staff ; but they did not do it. . . . I think there is always a sort of idea that lines of communication can get on somehow*” (13750 seq.).

To understand the position of affairs in South Africa when Sir Redvers Buller arrived there, it is necessary to review briefly the history of our military preparations in Natal.

Mr. Brodrick, in the course of his evidence before the Royal Commission, gave a short account of the origin of the trouble at Ladysmith. He said :—

“Take the question of Ladysmith. . . . Two things were made clear. First of all was one that was within my own knowledge, because I was at the Council at which the question was settled, of where troops were to be posted in Natal when they were first sent in the year 1897, I think. Lord Wolseley then gave an opinion that they were to be posted at Ladysmith, in order to occupy a position (Laing’s Nek, I think) in case of war. *Then later on it transpired that a force was sent there, and Sir George White was sent in command of it in 1899, but that no scheme had been drawn out as to what was to happen in the various contingencies, nothing which a commander in the field could lay his hand upon and say, ‘ If that happens I know what is going to be done ’*” (21627).

With regard to defensive operations it should be remembered that Lord Wolseley’s plan was not to hold Ladysmith itself in strength but “certain positions, one in front of Ladysmith on the Biggarsberg” (8718). The point is of importance in view

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of what actually happened, and it seems worth while to quote the following additional extract from Lord Wolseley's evidence :—

“In 1896 I addressed the Secretary of State on the subject of increasing the Natal garrison, and I pointed out that in order to have a full brigade of Cavalry and a brigade of Foot to occupy the position known as the Biggarsberg, we still required a regiment of Cavalry, a battery of Horse Artillery, and two battalions of Foot” (8727).

In the opinion of Sir John Ardagh, who was Director of Military Intelligence when the war broke out, and had occupied that position since 1896, “Ladysmith was a very unfortunate place at which to accumulate either men or stores” (5164). The place “was selected by the local officers and with the concurrence undoubtedly of the people at home. The reason that it was selected is that it was a railway junction. . . . There were subordinate reasons, such as there being a nice site for a cantonment, and good water and good ground for artillery and rifle ranges” (5211-2). Stores were not sent there “in quantities until 1897, perhaps even 1898. There was no large quantity there in 1897.”

The “entanglement” was due to faults in our system of organizing a campaign. Its development was thus described by Sir John Ardagh :—

“The whole position of Ladysmith changed from day to day from the moment of its first being made a military station. When the officer in Natal had only his handful

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of men, then he was obliged to allocate to Ladysmith a mere petty garrison. It was then a case of, perhaps, making one little fort and holding out there; whereas in later times, as the number of the garrisons increased, or the number of troops stationed in Ladysmith increased, the projects for its defence would naturally increase in magnitude. The stores belonging to 200 men would be insignificant. It would not be a question of moving stores then, or even defending them" (5073-4).

But the supplies accumulated in Ladysmith in the summer of 1899 were "vastly larger; they were large enough for 6,000 or 7,000 men" in Sir John Ardagh's opinion, and eventually "they were much larger than that, because all the troops which came up to reinforce the army in Natal brought their stores to Ladysmith" (5075-6). Yet the town

"was an objectionable place; it was merely looked upon as a suitable place for a cantonment, not a suitable place for a fortress. . . . It was not at all suitable for defence purposes. . . . Our idea at home was that the stores would be withdrawn to a defensible position, which, from our point of view, would naturally have been the line of the Tugela" (5062-3-4).

Moreover, Sir Richard Harrison, the Inspector General of Fortifications, told the Royal Commission that "certainly Ladysmith was treated as an open camp. I do not imagine that the idea was that they would ever contemplate standing a siege there" (2038). And "there were no works built that I know of" (2035). "I do not think there were any works for the defence of Natal or the frontier proposed" (2037).

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Sir George White landed at Durban on October 7, 1899. He thus described his position with regard to the general scheme to be adopted in South Africa : "*When I arrived in Natal I had no instructions in regard to the wishes of the Government as to any particular plan of campaign, nor was I aware of any general plan of operations in South Africa*" (Quoted by Lord Roberts, 10187). At the time "there was no protection round Ladysmith, not a sod turned" (Lord Roberts, 10190). The schemes of defence drawn up by officers who had previously commanded on the spot were, as has been pointed out, constructed under the limitation imposed by the King's Regulations, and were, therefore, only applicable to the small body of troops that formed the normal garrison of the colony, and it is not surprising to find that Sir George White said of them, "I think they were so inapposite to the altered conditions that I should only have treated them as a line for my guidance, and in no way considered myself fettered by them" (14714).

General White was not sure whether he had seen those schemes of defence or not (*ib.*). In spite of the unfavourable opinion which the home authorities entertained of the ground as a tenable position, Sir George remarked that "Ladysmith had been pointed out to me as a place regarding which there was a consensus of opinion that it should be the most strongly held in Northern Natal, by all the officers who had been in command before me, and by the preparations they had made, and even by the schemes of defence which General Symons

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talked over with me when I met him in Durban " (14713).

Lord Roberts commented on the subject in the following terms: "I think it very strange that the authorities should not have talked this question" (of holding Ladysmith) "over with the officer appointed to command in Natal; but I think the explanation is that they never dreamt that Ladysmith would have to be abandoned" (10228). Lord Roberts' meaning clearly is that the War Office had never realized the possibility of a successful invasion of Natal by the Boers.

In addition to that town the British forces were holding Glencoe, a position concerning which Lord Roberts said, "It is a basin surrounded by hills, and I cannot conceive a worse place for anything like a depot or frontier station" (10190). In this particular Sir George White's conduct was determined by the following considerations. It is an act of bare justice to that distinguished officer to draw attention to them. And they are full of significance as regards our traditional methods.

"On learning the disposition of the troops, I had been much impressed by the exposed position of the force at Glencoe, and had discussed it with Sir W. Penn Symons. He had given the subject great thought, had consulted the colonial officers and local civil authorities, and was most confident that he had sufficient troops there to hold his own against the Boers. He also dwelt to me on the advantages that the ground around Glencoe offered for the tactics of his trained troops against burgher levies. Notwithstanding his opinion, I considered the Glencoe force should be with-

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drawn. Ladysmith appeared to me the most advanced post that could practically be held against the two main divisions of the Boer Army. . . . Feeling that Ladysmith was the most advanced post that I could hold in force to use as a shield to cover the vitals of Natal, I sought an interview with the Governor, Sir W. Hely-Hutchinson, to tell him of my intention to concentrate there. He has himself given an account of that interview, which took place at Pietermaritzburg on October 9, 1899. His account was laid before Parliament in January, 1900, and is no doubt before the Commissioners. It will be seen that Sir W. Hely-Hutchinson gave a most decided opinion that a withdrawal from Glencoe would be disastrous, involving the probability of the Dutch not only in Natal, but also in the Cape Colony, throwing in their lot openly with the Boers. He further said that the effect on the natives, of whom there were some 750,000 in Natal and Zululand, might be disastrous, and that loyalists would be disgusted and discouraged. He also informed me that the opinions he had expressed were not his only, but were shared by the Prime Minister and by every member of the Natal Government.

“The dangers described above have since been referred to as mere political considerations, which should not have been allowed to override military principles ; but I submit that to dismiss them thus, after the danger is passed, is to deprive them of the weight that was due to them when I had to decide. The issue that appealed to me with greatest force was the rising of 750,000 of perhaps the most warlike and bloodthirsty natives in our Empire. Had it taken place, it would have been as great a disaster in a military sense as in a political ” (14707).

In a subsequent passage of his evidence Sir George White gave a further explanation :—

“ I was probably the only one in South Africa at the time

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who had been all through the Indian Mutiny, and I felt a very heavy responsibility in acting against the advice of my responsible, I might say my constitutional, advisers on what the effect of a given order of mine might be upon 750,000 natives. I pressed the Governor with regard to it. I said: 'You have put before me terrible risks with regard to the result of my proposed action that I think I would not be justified in facing.' He adhered to his view most firmly" (14734).

Sir George summed up the motives for his decision in the following phrases :—

"If I had ordered withdrawal, and their anticipations had turned out true, it would have been said, with reason, that after a few hours' experience of a country in which I had never been before, I had acted in direct opposition to the opinions of all my responsible advisers on such a point, who for years had had their fingers on the pulse of native opinion, and that I had thus brought about a most terrible disaster" (14707).

When General White arrived in Natal he had with him Colonel Sir E. W. D. Ward, who, after the relief of Ladysmith, was Director of Supplies with the Field Force. Colonel Ward gave the Royal Commissioners an account of the accumulation of stores at Ladysmith. On October 7 there were in that place approximately a two months' reserve for 1,870 men and 1,000 horses (5697). This amount could probably have been withdrawn behind the Tugela before the Boers reached Ladysmith. Colonel Ward was asked "whether the selection of Ladysmith as the main base for the

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larger force with which you had to deal when you arrived in South Africa was made before or only after the arrival of Sir George White in Natal?" and his answer was "I should think it was probably made before" (5718). It was not this officer's business to express an opinion as to the selection of the base. "I got my orders, and only had to carry them out" (5731). Colonel Ward understood that the stores were being moved up by order of the officer commanding in Natal prior to Sir George White's arrival (5940); the process was not stopped, and between the 7th of October and the 2nd of November, when the siege of Ladysmith began, the supplies were increased to the amount calculated for 15,600 men for sixty-five days as regards bread-stuff and smaller but very considerable reserves of meat, groceries and forage (5725, *seq.*). In fact, Ladysmith had only been regarded as one of the steps on the way to Pretoria (5936). *Considered as a defensive position, it may almost be said to have been chosen by accident and saved by luck.*

Fortunately for the British Empire, General White took kindly to this poor substitute for the lines of Torres Vedras. His view was—

"It was necessary to accept something that had been gone into and settled by my predecessors in command. Had I made changes which required considerable time to carry out, I should have been caught 'swopping horses in midstream.' With regard to Ladysmith being in a hollow, I held the heights around, and took advantage of the hollows—which were screened by the heights from the enemy's observation—for hospitals, ammunition parks, etc. With reference to its being

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no position at all, I can only urge that I defended it for 119 days against the headquarters and united armies of the South African Republics" (14707, p. 147).

The risk was very great.

"In point of fact, the perimeter (fourteen miles) was too big for any school rule to hold, with the men I had. I had to play to a certain extent a game of brag with regard to the positions I held. Knowing the great range of their guns, and also from my early experience, I took up positions not because I thought they were advisable abstractedly in the defensive, but to deny them as artillery positions to the enemy; if he had occupied them he would have made Ladysmith untenable" (14796).

Sir George White knew that it was of vital importance to hold his ground.

"It was suspected then, and the suspicion has since been confirmed, that the occupation of that town (Ladysmith) by the Boer forces had been decided on by the disloyal Dutch in both colonies as the signal for a general rising; as, in fact, a material guarantee that the power of the combined Republics was really capable of dealing with any force the British Empire was able to place in the field against them" (14707, p. 146).

There was a shortage not only of naval (19113-4-5-6) but of field artillery ammunition (5765, *seq.*). Colonel Ward was asked, "Do you think that the defence was prejudiced thereby?" and his answer was, "I should think so. I should think that, probably, the Boers got more hopeful as they found that they were not being fired back at; they thought

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that we were probably in a worse condition than we really were" (5767). The difficulties were enormous. Sir George White was asked, "The enemy's guns were superior to ours?" He replied, "Undoubtedly they were; they fired over 10,000 yards into my position with Creusots."

"Q. That was because they brought into use larger guns than the Army possessed at that time?"

A. Yes; than the Army possessed, mobilized as the Boers mobilize. *If I had not telegraphed for those naval guns the moment I came up, I should have had to fight the Boer guns with our field-gun, which was a 15-pounder, the effective range of which was 3,500 yards, and when directed at an objective 4,000 yards off, began to fall off rapidly*" (14823-4).

Again,

These 4.7 and the 12-pounder guns of the Navy outranged my soldier guns by 100 per cent.

Q. The ranges of the guns show exactly what would have happened?

A. Yes; it was extraordinary the way in which the Boers could put a six-inch Creusot gun into a wagon and go off with it as if it was a sack of wheat.

Q. Why should the Boers be able to do that quicker than our men?

A. My belief is that our transport drivers were largely corner men; the transport drivers of the Boers were men who had been driving oxen all their lives; they knew every ox in their team by name, and could get the last pound out of each. Our drivers would never have got those guns up to the top of Bulwana" (14825, *seq.*).

General Buller's well-known telegram of December

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16, 1899, to Sir George White is printed on page 161 of the Second Volume of the *Minutes of Evidence*. It would be irrelevant to discuss it here. Sir George White's opinion with regard to the accuracy of the naval shooting will be found in his answers to Questions 14930-1-2. It was favourable but guarded. The sailor in charge was able to tell the Royal Commission that "the Boer guns never silenced us, and we constantly silenced them."
—Lambton, 19123.

The Committee of Three wrote :—

"We are directed, by the terms of our Reference, to take the Admiralty system of higher administration as the basis of our action, and we are convinced that, while there may be imperfections in the working of that system, it is absolutely sound in principle. It has been handed down without material change from the period of great naval wars. It may be said to have been founded on the proved requirements of war, and although it has not in recent times been put to the supreme test, it has smoothly and successfully met new demands as they have arisen, including an enormous increase of *personnel* and *matériel*. It conforms closely to the arrangements under which the largest private industries are conducted. Finally, it has retained the confidence of the Navy and of the nation."—Report, Part I. p. 7.

Further, Table B, printed in Part III. of the Committee's Report and here reproduced, "shows at a glance the similarity between the Admiralty and the Reconstituted War Office System of Administration." In view of this most important change it is instructive to contrast the working of the naval and the military arrangements in the

OFFICE RECONSTITUTION

ARMY COUNCIL.

- { *Responsibility to the Crown and to Parliament.*
- { *General direction and supervision of all business.*
- l Staff { *Military Policy and Military Intelligence, Strategy,*
- { *War Organization and Operations.*
- { *Personnel.*
- ral - { *Supply.*
- f the { *Armaments and Fortifications.*
- { *Barracks and Non-Effective Services.*
- { *Finance.*

l Officers Commanding-in-Chief.

Administration.
(Major-Generals commanding Districts.)

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early stages of the campaign, when the War Office was still supposed to be confronted by a task for which its appointed resources sufficed.

There was a businesslike promptitude about the action of the "handy men" all through. Rear-Admiral Lambton read the following "short précis" to the Commission :—

"September 24, *Powerful* left Singapore ; October 3, arrived at Mauritius ; war rumours serious ; bought up all available khaki ; found half battalion Yorkshire Light Infantry ; suggested taking them to South Africa. War Office approved. October 10, arrived Durban ; ordered to Cape Town. October 13, arrived Cape ; disembarked troops. October 17, *Powerful's* marines and one 8-pounder and crew landed under command of Commander Ethelston. (These men went to Stormberg.) October 26, *Powerful* left Simon's Town about midnight. . . . October 29, arrived Durban ; disembarked with Naval Brigade, consisting of 283 officers and men, and started about 7 P.M. for Ladysmith. October 30, arrived Ladysmith about 9.30 A.M., and found battle of Lombard's Kop in progress. . . . Long Tom, after some good shooting, succeeded in pitching a shell under the leading gun, upsetting it, and seriously wounding all the three men in charge of it, the oxen and Kaffir drivers bolting into the town. Took up a position with other two guns on slope, and commenced duel with Long Tom, which, after some most brilliant shooting by Mr. (now Lieutenant) Sims, gunner, ceased firing for the day (this was about 1 P.M.). Sir George White personally warmly thanked me for the timely assistance so unexpectedly afforded him" (19097-8).

Vice-Admiral Sir R. Harris was in command at the Cape in 1899. He told the Royal Commission :—

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“About August I began to assemble the ships in my squadron and put them all through a thorough course of docking and repair in readiness for any emergency. . . . I did it on my own initiative, on what I imagined was coming. Of course I was in consultation with Sir Alfred Milner as well.

“It was a matter of very common conversation in Cape Town that the Boers were preparing for war. That was in June; and in July I was shooting near Port Elizabeth and met several English farmers of that district, who told me they were absolutely certain, from what they knew of their Dutch colleagues, that they were preparing for war. Following that up again I went up the River Maputa from Lourenço Marques on a shooting expedition nominally, but for another purpose really, and there I came across a Dutch farmer named Kotse, who travelled constantly in the Orange Free State and the Transvaal, and he asked to speak to me privately. He said to me: ‘Well, Admiral, I may tell you this in confidence. The Boers are certain to make war directly the grass comes in October.’ I said: ‘What is your reason?’ and he said, ‘I travel about from farmhouse to farmhouse, and they all tell me war is coming.’ I naturally made a note of that and telegraphed it to Sir Alfred Milner. . . . I let him have a telegram at once. I went up the Maputa River, I may say, with the view, in case war broke out, to find a base to get up by sea through Portuguese territory, if they would allow it; and up the Maputa River you can take boats up to within forty miles of the Transvaal, with very easy country for going over.

“I had a very small squadron, and it was very necessary that they should all be perfectly complete before war broke out, as the station is a very extended one. It reaches from north of the equator on the west side up to the equator very nearly on the east side. The ships are generally spread about a good deal, and it would take me some three months, in the event of war, to get

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them together. They then want docking and repairing, and, as a matter of fact, every one was docked and repaired before the war. They were absolutely ready when war was declared on October 11" (18959, *seq.*).

Sometimes the naval methods were literally breezy. When Rear-Admiral Chichester was speaking about the custody of Boer prisoners in the course of his evidence before the Royal Commission, he said—

"On one occasion the Government sent 400 mutineers off to sea in a gale of wind, and I think it did them a world of good; they had been stoning the sentries, and that sort of thing. That was at Green Point, Cape Town. General Forestier-Walker asked me if I could give them a transport and take the mutineers on a sea voyage, and I said, 'Certainly,' and they were sent to sea in a gale of wind, a north-westerly wind, to Simon's Bay. They remained there for a day, and then came back again. They were sea-sick the whole way there and the whole way back, and I think it had a very good effect, because when they were landed again they told their friends what they might expect."

The witness added that he did not think there was so much trouble afterwards (9952-3).

There can be no question that the Navy rendered services of inestimable value, but they were given at a heavy cost. *In the whole of the evidence heard by the Royal Commission there are, perhaps, no passages so serious and significant as the following.*

Sir R. Harris said :—

"After the ultimatum the Admiralty telegraphed to

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me and said I was to consider it my principal duty to protect the seaports of the coast but not, if possible, to land any men except in a case of great emergency (18997).

"As the pressure became greater the Admiralty practically gave me a free hand as regards sending up people, on condition that the ships were kept fit for immediate service in case of contingencies occurring in Europe. But I was warned by the Admiralty that the *Terrible* was very much required in China (19000).

"Sending a brigade to Ladysmith from the *Powerful* broke up the *Powerful*. I had simply to tie her up during the rest of the war (19005).

"I broke up the *Powerful* and the *Terrible*, and the other ships had to go shorthanded. When the *Terrible* men were landed for the defence of Durban she was simply tied up useless. The complement that remained on board were only enough to steam her. No fighting qualities remained at all (19008).

"Men came out later, and came out fairly promptly, but not enough to fill up the *Terrible* and the *Powerful*" (19009).

Comment is needless. The present Secretary of State for War has said :—

"In any war other than one with a small inland Power, such as the Transvaal, the withdrawal of the crews of the sea-going ships would have been a step that would have called for the impeachment of the First Lord of the Admiralty who sanctioned it."—*The War Office, the Army and the Empire*, by H. O. Arnold-Forster, p. 31.

What was the cause of the perilous unreadiness and confusion at the Cape? Obviously, the absence of an authoritative plan, based on accurate information and constructed on scientific military principles

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to meet contingencies which had been in view for years. We were forewarned, but we were not forearmed. I am not here discussing the ruinous "political exigencies" which prevented the grant of funds and the supply of adequate reinforcements in time. These did not affect directly the need for the careful working out of a scheme of first operations—the scheme which ought to have been in existence and was not.

What is the remedy? The answer is given in the following comments of the Committee of Three :—

"When the South African war broke out, the mobilisation scheme was so well advanced that the equipping and the transport to the posts of embarkation of successive units was smoothly carried out. *Not only, however, was there no trained General Staff, but some of the most important duties of such a staff were not assigned to any body of officers.* At this time, 'drill and military training,' combined with such incongruous subjects as cooking, school of music and sergeants' messes, were dealt with by a small section under two officers.

"We have no hesitation in stating that such conditions gravely prejudiced the conduct of operations in South Africa, and we therefore attach extreme importance to the constitution of a General Staff with defined functions in peace and in war, educated for its special duties, drawing to itself the pick of the brains of the Army, and working continuously to improve the training of the troops and the standard of their preparations for war. To create such a staff will require time, and we strongly urge that the necessary steps should be taken forthwith.

"A General Staff, as the term is understood in all well-organized armies, consists of a department which devotes

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its undivided attention to military problems in the widest sense, and of a body of officers occupied in peace in the training of all ranks of the Army and prepared to direct operations in the field." (Report, Part II. p. 22.)

The creation of a General Staff for the British Army is no hastily devised innovation. The following paragraphs are taken from the Report of the Hartington Commission, which was issued in 1890 :—

“ We are informed that in the military systems of all the great Powers of Europe, there is a special Department of the Chief of the Staff, freed from all executive functions, and charged with the responsible duty of preparing plans of military operations, collecting and co-ordinating information of all kinds, and generally tendering advice upon all matters of organization and the preparation of the army for war. We consider that by the creation of such a central organizing department, the military defence of the Empire would be considered as a whole, and its requirements dealt with in accordance with a definite and harmonious plan.

“ A chief of the Staff should be appointed for five years, capable of renewal, and be made responsible for the following duties :—

(a) To advise the Secretary of State on all matters of general military policy, and all questions as to the strength, distribution, and mobilization of your Majesty's land forces, and the relative importance of various services put forward by the heads of Departments.

(b) To collect and co-ordinate all military information.

(c) *To prepare and revise, from time to time, a general scheme for the military defence of the Empire, and to examine the estimates with a view to insure that they are framed in harmony with that scheme.*

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(d) *To prepare plans of action in certain contingencies.*

(e) To communicate directly with the First Naval Lord of the Admiralty on all matters involving inter-departmental policy; to examine all correspondence with other Departments of State, and to conduct all correspondence with General Officers Commanding on questions of military policy.

(f) To lay before the Secretary of State an annual report stating clearly all the military requirements of the Empire."

The Committee of Three have pointed out, "that had the recommendations of the majority of the Hartington Commission not been ignored, the country would have been saved the loss of many thousands of lives, and of many millions of pounds, subsequently sacrificed in the South African War." (Third Letter to the Prime Minister.)

No blame for the disasters which nearly overwhelmed the Army in 1899 is attributable to the Intelligence Department as it then existed. The funds at its disposal were ridiculously insufficient—the Colonial Section, which dealt with *all* the Colonies, was able to spend about £2,000 a year on its work in South Africa during the three years that preceded the war. *The Staff allowed for the performance of its duties was two officers and one clerk.* In the same period of three years the Transvaal Government spent £286,000 or more on secret service. (Sir John Ardagh, 5125, *seq.*) And the *personnel* of our whole Department only numbered sixty, *including the clerks.* The money expended on it in 1899 amounted to £18,917, and in 1902 to £24,092. The Commissioners wrote upon this subject,

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“that it” (the Department) “was undermanned for the work of preparation for a great war will scarcely be denied.” (Report, p. 128.) The criticism does not err by its severity.

Nevertheless, the Intelligence branch had supplied information of the greatest value. As far back as June, 1896, Lieutenant Colonel—then Major—E. A. Altham had written :—

“It is not *per se* impossible that, if hostilities break out, the two Boer States may make a dash at Natal. The enclosed papers, and Major Northcott’s letter, indicate that there are local apprehensions that such may be the case.

“It would seem, therefore, very necessary that the possibility of such an event should be seriously considered, and it may even be thought expedient that secret instructions should be prepared and sent to the General Officer Commanding, South Africa, for his guidance, in the event of war breaking out.” (Report of the Royal Commission on the War in South Africa, p. 162.)

It is true that Colonel Altham underrated the forces which the two Republics could put into the field; he estimated them, in June, 1899, at 29,000 men. (Report, p. 175.) Lord Kitchener believed that “during the whole war they had 95,000 men out,” including Cape rebels and a certain number of foreigners (256). But the information given with regard to the guns and ammunition in the possession of the Boers was “extraordinarily accurate” (504). Unfortunately the warnings of the Intelligence Department were disregarded.

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With regard to the depletion of warships' crews it must not be supposed that no machinery for co-ordinating military and naval action existed in 1899. There was a "Joint Military and Naval Defence Committee," whose duties are thus described in a passage of Sir W. Nicholson's evidence before the Royal Commission :—

"Q. I think there is another committee at the War Office called the Joint Military and Naval Defence Committee, of which you, I think, are a member ?

A. Yes, I am a member of that committee.

Q. What are supposed to be the exact functions of that committee ?

A. *It advises the Admiralty and the War Office on strategical questions which are referred to it ; strategical questions in matters of defence.*

Q. Does it meet regularly or only at uncertain intervals ?

A. At uncertain intervals."

But this Committee had evidently no power of influencing the course of general strategical preparations and of saving the Navy from burdens which impaired its efficiency. It did not, as the new Defence Committee of the Cabinet will, discharge the high duty of considering matters which "relate to the co-ordination of Imperial questions jointly affecting the Admiralty, War Office, and other Departments of State" (Report of the Committee of Three, Part II. p. 22).

CHAPTER III

THE CABINET SYSTEM AND PREPARATION FOR WAR

IRRESOLUTION was the keynote of our military policy in the summer of 1899, and no military policy is so certain to fail as one that halts between two opinions. Yet the Commander-in-Chief had a definite plan, the Government, as we have seen, had a plainly declared purpose, and the £640,000 which the Army Board demanded was a mere *bagatelle* regarded as a premium to insure the safety of the South African Colonies. But the politicians, for reasons which appealed to them strongly, balked the soldiers and only accepted their counsels when it was too late. In this respect our history may at any time repeat itself; for the scheme of the Committee of Three does not remove the danger, but increases it. Under the circumstances no apology is needed for an attempt to bring home to the minds of readers the inner history of our unreadiness as it was disclosed before the Royal Commission on the War.

The following passage forms the opening of the statement which General Buller placed before the Commissioners :—

“ In June, 1899, I was summoned from Aldershot by

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Lord Lansdowne, who told me that, in the event of the war in South Africa, I had been selected to hold the command-in-chief. After submitting to him what seemed to me a preferable arrangement, I accepted the command, and we proceeded to discuss the question of the military policy to be pursued. I maintained that the only practicable route was that through the Orange Free State. *He declined even to discuss this.* Ultimately, we agreed that one Army Corps, a Cavalry division, and seven battalions for the lines of communication would be a sufficient force, if the object of the Government were merely to attack the Transvaal; but I added that to leave the Orange Free State out of account was, to my mind, impossible. After leaving Lord Lansdowne, I saw the Commander-in-Chief at the War Office, gave him a summary of my remarks, and received from him a promise of every assistance that he could afford. I begged both Lord Lansdowne and Lord Wolseley to recollect that I was not in the same position as Lord Wolseley when he organized the Egyptian Expedition of 1882, for he was then the Adjutant-General and had the whole of the War Office at his back, whereas I was fully employed with my work at Aldershot" (14963).

Lord Lansdowne remembered telling Sir Redvers Buller

"that the attitude of the Orange Free State was doubtful, and that if it so happened that, after all, President Steyn maintained an attitude of neutrality, it might be difficult for us to force our way through the Orange Free State, and thereby drive them into open opposition."

But he added,

"I certainly never suggested to Sir Redvers Buller that the Orange Free State had not to be reckoned with" (21121).

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General Buller was not invited at the time to consult the Director of Military Intelligence. He was "told to keep his appointment strictly confidential" (15056). He did obtain certain information in an informal way from the Director of that Department, Sir John Ardagh, who was "a very old friend" of his, but he "did not think he had any Intelligence Department documents given to him until he was appointed Commander-in-Chief" on October 9 (15053-4-5-6).

To gain any understanding of the drama of cross purposes which commenced at the interview in June, 1899, it is necessary to bear in mind the following points :—

(1) General Buller himself believed that war was inevitable, but "doubted that the Boers would bring it on unless we did" (14966). He was convinced that when war came the Free State would act in alliance with the Transvaal (15042 ; 15058), and his impression was that Lord Lansdowne, until September 23, directed him that "the Orange Free State was to be left out of account" (15058 ; 15068).

(2) Lord Wolseley believed "as early as 1898" (8700) that war with the "Boer Power was, sooner or later, inevitable" (8699). He entertained, practically, no doubt that the Free Staters would join the Transvaalers (8703 ; 9085).

(3) Lord Lansdowne assumed that the Transvaal Government was carrying on *bona fide* negotiations with the Home Government during the summer of 1899, and, in his view, the future action of the Free State was an indeterminate factor in the situation throughout the same period (21200 ; 21121).

(4) Mr. Balfour, in November, 1899, "made a speech at Dewsbury, and he there said that on September 28

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(the figures worked out to that), if he had been asked whether the Orange Free State were likely to be at war with us he would have replied we were more likely to be at war with Switzerland. In fact, he seems to have accepted the belief that 'the Boers would not fight.' "—General Buller (15037).

The military policy actually adopted by the Government during the summer of 1899 was governed by these divergences of opinion. They did not, as Lord Wolseley advised them, mobilize an Army Corps on Salisbury Plain (8778) in order to have a striking force in readiness, but they resolved to reinforce the garrisons in South Africa to a strength at which they would be able to protect the Colonies effectively, not from "raids and incursions" but "from being overrun" (Lord Lansdowne, 21,171). They were aware that "unless preparations were made beforehand for the provision of animals and equipment, the completion of the mobilization of the Field Force" (for the advance upon Pretoria, as distinct from the defensive force) "could not be completed in South Africa under about four months" (Sir F. W. Stopford, 943). "The approval of the Secretary of State for all the necessary expenditure" (for the above purpose) "was not given until September 30, 1899" (*ib.*).¹

Substantially, this matter is not in dispute. Lord Lansdowne realized that, after mobilization, "there was a period of three months which must

¹ This means, of course, that General Buller was financed for the campaign a fortnight before it began. It is not an exaggeration to say that a man could not make the necessary arrangements for taking a touring company round the provinces in that time.

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elapse before the field force was ready to take the field" (21210). He said, "Were we justified in taking that risk? I submit we were, because we were told by our military advisers that in the interim the Colonies were not exposed to any serious danger. We were led to believe that during that period of three months no serious harm would come to the Colonies" (*ib.*). The implied censure was not accepted by the Commander-in-Chief. But, plainly, the immediate problem before the Cabinet and the soldiers who were consulted by Ministers in the summer of 1899 was not the preparation and dispatch of the striking force, but the garrisoning of the Colonies in such a manner as to prevent serious disasters, in the event of war, till the Field Force was ready to act. What happened showed that the garrisons were insufficient and badly distributed. Serious disasters did take place, and "it was only the action of the Boers in scattering all their forces in investing Ladysmith, Kimberley, and Mafeking, which saved us" (Ardagh, 5187).

It should be borne in mind that "to mobilize requires Parliamentary sanction" (Sir R. Knox, 1400), though "the Government can always, upon its responsibility, give orders for some expenses to be incurred, they taking the necessary steps immediately to obtain in constitutional ways a grant of funds" (1398).

To resume the narrative of events: On June 8 Lord Wolseley advised the Government, through the Secretary of State, as follows:—

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“Taking advantage of the recent outbreak of fever in Natal, we might —

(1) Accumulate in South Africa a large amount of medical transport and material.

(2) Nominally to superintend the hutting of the troops at Ladysmith and other stations, we might send out three Field Companies R.E.

(3) Commissariat supplies to a very large extent could be collected at Cape Town and Maritzburg.

(4) We could at once despatch to the great sources of mule supply officers to make arrangements for purchasing mules as soon as they received telegraphic orders to begin.

(5) We could increase our naval squadron on the Cape station. This is, I think, a point of much importance.

(6) We have been of late years urged very strongly to mobilize one of our three Army Corps and a Cavalry division. Let us do this at once on Salisbury Plain, under the General who it is intended should command in South Africa in the event of war. The expense would be an extremely small matter when compared with the cost of a war, and it might probably wake up the Transvaal to the fact that England was at last serious, and, by doing so, prevent war altogether. This would not require any immediate calling out of the Army Reserve.”
—Report Vol. p. 262.

Reasons were given by Lord Lansdowne to explain why the Cabinet declined to adopt Lord Wolseley's main suggestion :—

“The political situation at that time was as follows : the Bloemfontein Conference had failed, but negotiations had been immediately resumed and were proceeding hopefully, not unsatisfactorily; and I see that on June 7—that is the day before Lord Wolseley wrote his Minute—the Prime Minister had made a

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statement that he was able to form a sanguine forecast of a successful issue. At any rate the moment was not one when the Cabinet was prepared to mobilize an Army Corps or to take any other steps of a distinctly minatory and provocative character " (21179).

Lord Wolseley's view was that

"there was no danger that our mobilization of this Army Corps should have hastened Mr. Kruger's declaration of war, and this is a very important point, because I know people would at first say that if we had done so Mr. Kruger would have declared war immediately ; but my answer to that is a very simple one, and it will be understood by any one who knows the condition of things in South Africa, that Mr. Kruger could not have taken the field before the time he did, and he took the field upon the very earliest date that the Boer forces could take the field in South Africa, because all their men were mounted and were dependent entirely upon grass, and they have no grass to eat until early in October, in fact, "the 10th is a very early time for grass " (8778).

Lord Lansdowne did not consider this argument convincing. He said :—

"I doubt whether that is quite sustainable ; that proceeds on the assumption that the Boer forces could not carry on hostilities during the months of our summer ; but as a matter of fact, the Boer forces have remained in the field and have carried on hostilities, and, I am afraid, carried them on with very considerable success at all times of the year " (21180).

But it must be remembered that the conditions which prevailed when the Boers had definitely adopted guerilla tactics, and had been long in the

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field, and when many of their women and children were in the concentration camps, were very different from those which obtained among the burghers in the early days of the conflict. Then they were engaged—if one may use the phrase—in a kind of “family war.” Mr. Amery, of *The Times*, who was in the Boer laager at Sandspruit just before the outbreak of hostilities, said :—

“One family very often had about three times as much transport as they wanted. The Boers I was staying with had three tents, a German cook, and several Kaffirs, and so on ; but, taken as a whole, they had no transport, and I know when I was at Sandspruit Laager they shifted the laager for better grazing a distance of about three miles, and they had to do double journeys for a great part of the transport to move that three miles” (20427).

Moreover, if Lord Lansdowne had had serious apprehensions that the Boers might mobilize at any time, he would hardly have left the garrisons at the Cape so weak as they were in the early part of the summer of 1899. They were “in a sense counters, and not current coin ” till the end of June, and on August 1 consisted of only 8,500 men.

Mr. Amery’s information certainly supported Lord Wolseley’s opinion that the Republics had settled their policy and resolved to fight at an earlier date, and were only awaiting their opportunity. He told the Royal Commission :—

“The ultimatum, I believe, was ready on September 27. . . . I believe it was entirely due to this hopeless jumble with their supplies and transport, and so on, in

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the beginning of October, that Joubert refused flatly to move until the 9th. The moment Joubert said he was ready to move at all, then the Government of Pretoria sent in their ultimatum" (20426).

It has been seen that the British Government did not accept the advice which Lord Wolseley offered on June 8. "A meeting of the Confidential Mobilization Committee was held on June 17, 1899. Its report provided for :—

"(a) The completion of all field units in South Africa with regimental transport and equipment.

"(b) The despatch to that country of two companies Army Service Corps, a detachment of Army Ordnance Corps, and some remount and veterinary officers.

"(c) The organization of a supply park to complete the provision for supplies in the field."—Appendix Vol. p. 17.

This report was submitted to the Secretary of State on *June* 30.

Apparently these measures were at the moment considered by the Cabinet to be of "a distinctly minatory and provocative character," for :—

"The Secretary of State's approval of proposals (a) and (b) was notified on *September* 11, 1899. Proposal (c) was not agreed to at the time" (*ib.*).

General Buller has given the following account of what happened next :—

"I heard no more of warlike preparations till July 3, when I was summoned by telegram from Devonshire to London. There Lord Lansdowne informed me that

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he had under consideration a proposal to send out to South Africa one division of Infantry and one brigade of Cavalry" (14963, p. 170).

Sir Redvers entertained objections to this plan, which he has thus explained :—

" I objected to sending out any portion of what was intended to be our fighting force before we had a plan of campaign, and before we had, at any rate, come to a decision as to in what portion of the very large country, South Africa, the fighting force was really intended to be employed.

Q. Was not the object of sending out the 10,000 men then proposed simply to strengthen the existing garrisons in Cape Colony and Natal ?

A. No, it was not ; it was a definite force" (14971-2).

In a memorandum, dated July 6, General Buller made the following recommendations :—

" My view is that the operations against Pretoria should be commenced in the following sequence —

(1) Strengthen the Cape Colony and Natal garrisons to the extent local authority there now think sufficient to protect those Colonies.

(2) Make up your mind as to this route, and definitely as to the attitude to be adopted towards the Orange Free State.

(3) Commence the formations of magazines on the intended line of route, and the mobilization of the active force intended.

(4) Send out this fighting force."—Report Vol. p. 263.

The General in command at the Cape at this time was Sir William Butler.

Lord Wolseley, addressing the Secretary of State

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for War, made the following comments, *inter alia*, upon General Buller's Minute :—

“I regard his No. 2, if stated inversely, as the first matter for serious consideration, i.e. what is to be our attitude towards the Orange Free State? On the decision of that question will mainly rest the point, which Sir Redvers must settle on his own responsibility, namely, the route of advance towards Pretoria. . . . We know of a secret treaty between the two Republics, according to the terms of which, if either be threatened or attacked by us, the other will assist with its armed forces. Is our Government prepared to demand from the Orange Free State—as a preliminary to any military operations against the Transvaal—an explicit statement of what will be its attitude should we be obliged by the South African Republic to make war upon it? . . . Our attitude towards the Free State being decided on, the choice of routes will follow almost as a matter of course. In other words, if we are to treat the Free State as hostile, our easiest advance would be due north from the Orange River by Norval's Pont and Bethulie Bridge, using the railroad thence via Bloemfontein to Pretoria as our main line of operations and supply.”

The Commander-in-Chief again urged

“as the most pressing step to be taken, and the most effective demonstration open to us, the immediate mobilization of one Army Corps and one Cavalry division—say 35,000 men—at Salisbury, or Aldershot, whichever might be cheapest and most convenient. . . .”

He endorsed recommendation No. 3 of Sir R. Buller's minute, and thought that no time should be lost in the formation of magazines on the intended

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line of advance. Three months' supplies of all sorts for one Army Corps and a Cavalry division should be provided.—Report Vol. p. 263.

The proposal to send out 10,000 men “came to nothing” (14963, p. 170). On July 8 Lord Wolseley wrote to Lord Lansdowne, “The sooner you will allow me to send officers to the mule-growing centres abroad the better.”

We now pass to one of the most mysterious episodes in the whole history of the preparations. A question, drawn up by Lord Wolseley, and dated July 17, had been put to Sir Redvers Buller. It was framed in the following terms :—

“Are you quite satisfied that our present position in the Cape Colony and Natal is quite safe? In the event of an ultimatum being sent to Kruger, telling him that unless he conceded what Sir A. Milner has demanded, her Majesty's Government will feel obliged to adopt measures other than diplomatic, do you see any necessity for sending to either or to both above-mentioned colonies, any augmentation of our present garrisons there? And, if so, what should such augmentation consist of?”

The following account of what happened upon this is given (p. 264 of Report Vol.) in a memorandum initialled by Lord Wolseley :—

“There was a meeting in Lord Lansdowne's room at the War Office on July 18, 1899, at which Sir R. Buller was asked this question. He replied that he had complete confidence in Butler's ability and forethought, and that as long as clever men like Butler and Symons, on the spot, did not say there was danger, he saw no necessity for sending out any troops in ad-

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vance of the Army Corps to strengthen our position against any possible attack by the Boers on our frontiers. I do not say these were his exact words, but they are the exact meaning and pith of what he said to Lord Lansdowne and me."

It is true that "Sir Penn Symons, on July 16, advised that a reinforcement of 2,000 men would put Natal in an efficient state of defence" (Lord Lansdowne, 21165). He was, of course, only speaking as to the colony in which he held command. But Sir William Butler's views as to the serious danger in which the British garrison would be placed on the outbreak of hostilities were known at the War Office. In a dispatch, dated June 14, 1899, he pointed out that "if the Dutch population north of the great range extending from Sneeuw Berg on the west, past the Zuur Berg to the Storm Berg, is actively hostile to us, it might be out of the power of the officers commanding the detached forces to reach the stations they have been directed to occupy." He drew attention to "the possibility that at least the opening stages of war between the Dutch Republics and ourselves might produce active or secret combinations against our communications" (13394). He "never proposed to hold the frontier" (13455), and was aware that 20,000 Boers could have "masked his three battalions" and marched into Cape Town unless the fleet stopped them (13459; 13462).

It appears, then, that Sir R. Buller either spoke with knowledge of Sir William Butler's opinion—in which case his remark to Lord Lansdowne and

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the Commander-in-Chief is scarcely intelligible—or that he spoke in ignorance of Sir W. Butler's warnings, in which case he expressed himself in the most misleading circumstances.

It is fair to describe, in his own words, the impression which General Buller formed of the events that succeeded, and to contrast his statement with the memoranda which were passing between the military and the political leaders in the course of the ensuing weeks. General Buller told the Commission, with reference to his note of July 6 :—

“I pressed hard at this time and afterwards, that our Colonies might be garrisoned in accordance with a proper scheme of defence. I urged this again and again, but without success.

“From that date to August 15, affairs went on but slowly at the War Office. No Council of War was held ; no plan of campaign was adopted ; no regular military preparations were undertaken. In the middle of August I heard that *all preparations for war in South Africa entailing expenditure had been stopped*, and that the Secretary of State for War had gone to Ireland. Mr. Balfour, during his absence, came to the War Office and had an interview with Mr. Wyndham and Lord Wolseley. I also heard that it was believed that an ultimatum was to be sent to the Transvaal on September 11.

“The condition of affairs seemed to me to be alarming, for the intelligence given in the newspapers made it impossible to believe that war could be avoided. Not knowing what else to do, I approached the private secretary to Lord Salisbury. He came down next day to Aldershot, when I presented my views to him in such a light that he thought it his duty to lay them before Lord Salisbury on the following morning. I drew up a short

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unofficial memorandum, dated September 3, arguing to the conclusion that the time had come for the diplomatic authorities to consult the military authorities" (14963, p. 170).

On August 2 Lord Lansdowne made a communication to Lord Wolseley, which commenced as follows :—

"The view of her Majesty's Government is that we should, without making ourselves responsible for the 'complete protection' of Natal in the sense of securing it from all possible risk of invasion, make some addition to the force now stationed in that colony.

"The object of such an addition would be to strengthen our diplomacy during the new phase which is commencing.

"The number of men which from the latter point of view seems to us sufficient, would be 2,000 or thereabouts."

Lord Wolseley's comments upon this proposal contain the following passages :—

"I am very glad it is contemplated to add some 2,000 or 3,000 men to our force in Natal, for, although that augmentation will not, I think, render the Colony entirely free from external danger, it will make our position north of the Tugela River, and at Ladysmith particularly, much more secure than it is at present. At this distance from Natal, I should not like to lay down where this reinforcement is to be quartered, for that is a matter that must be decided on the spot by the Major-General commanding in Natal. But I think it might be intimated to him that for political reasons it is desirable these extra troops should be pushed forward either to Ladysmith, or, if he thinks fit, even north of that position. He might be told that, if he deems

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it right to occupy Dundee, or even Newcastle, with a view to a more careful watching of Laing's Nek, he may do so."—(Report Vol. pp. 264-5.)

Possibly the officer commanding on the spot regarded such instructions as his warrant for massing stores at Ladysmith, though there is nothing to show that Lord Wolseley's plan of holding the Biggarsberg as a defensive position was cancelled.

There can be no doubt that the political, and not the military authorities were responsible for our unreadiness for action in South Africa at this time.

"After July, 1899, a Board sat fairly continuously through the war, under the name of the Army Board, kept regular minutes, which have been produced, and did, on the whole, excellent work. Its proceedings soon brought to light a serious deficiency in the stores and material required on the mobilization of an Army Corps; and evidence in considerable detail was given as to the nature of this deficiency, the effect it would have had on the prompt despatch of the expedition, and the means by which it might have been made good. The minutes of the Army Board during the period up to September 22, 1899, make it clear that in the opinion of that Board *the main difficulty was the refusal of sanction for the expenditure of the money involved, amounting to about £640,000*; and in the absence of some explanation for this refusal it was perhaps not unnatural that the military heads of departments should have felt at the time some anxiety in regard to a situation for which they might be held accountable, and should also desire to justify their conduct at length before the Commission. It is, however, equally manifest from his Minute of August 12 that Lord Lansdowne, as Secretary of State for War, fully appreciated the extent

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of the deficiency, and the consequence of any delay in the grant of money, and that he brought the whole circumstances before his colleagues. *The decision not to sanction expenditure, therefore, was taken by the Cabinet, though Lord Lansdowne, of course, does not dissociate himself from it.*"—(Report of Commissioners, p. 26.)

It is clear that Lord Lansdowne did not consider this expenditure essential for the safeguarding of Imperial interests. He has laid down in very clear terms the duty of a statesman in his position at such junctures :—

"The constitutional position is this: the Secretary of State, and the Secretary of State alone, is responsible to Parliament, and the Commander-in-Chief¹ is responsible to the Secretary of State. So long as those two officers continue to hold the positions assigned to them, so long it must be assumed that each of them is satisfied with the arrangements made by Parliament with regard to the Army. There are minor matters in which there must be give and take; but if the Secretary of State is not properly supported by his colleagues, or the Commander-in-Chief is not properly supported by the Government of the day, it is his duty not to remain in a position in which he is prevented from adequately discharging his duty."—(Lord Lansdowne, in the House of Lords, August 4, 1900.)

On August 18, 1899, Lord Wolseley addressed a memorandum to the Secretary of State for War, in which he expressed himself as follows :—

"I do not see all the telegrams that pass between the

¹ The position has now, of course, been altered by the abolition of the Commander-in-Chief's office.

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Colonial Office and Sir A. Milner, but from those I have read I gather he is anxious about the weakness of the military force we now have in South Africa. I have long shared this anxiety with him, and consider our present military position in Natal to be very unsatisfactory. . . .

“ I gather from Sir A. Milner’s recent telegrams that he is not satisfied with the number of troops quartered in the Cape Colony, and I am inclined to agree with him. One of the most serious events that could happen for our rule in South Africa would be any Dutch rising in any part of the colony. In my opinion we should hold the Orange River Station and the De Aar Junction (about seventy miles south of it) by one battalion, distributed as the general officer commanding in South Africa thinks fit, and Stormberg Junction (Moltino) should be held by another battalion. . . .

“ But much as I should like to thus strengthen our military position in the Cape Colony, I should still more wish to strengthen it in Natal. It is there that danger actually threatens . . . ”

A passage of vital importance occurs in this memorandum :—

“ There is no military difficulty in still preventing the possibility of this untoward invasion of Natal. But time presses, and as far as an outsider can judge, the Transvaal Government continues to make every preparation for war. At this distance from Natal we at home could do nothing to help our colonists if the Boers were to invade Natal next week.

“ It is for this reason that I would beg the Government to consider the advisability of sending to Natal, with the least possible delay, one Infantry division, one regiment of Cavalry, two brigade divisions of Artillery, and some Royal Engineers—altogether about 10,000 men. This would, in fact, be one of the three

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divisions to constitute the Army Corps it is intended to send there should war be forced upon us.

"I calculate that from the date of receiving the order to do this, if given a free hand, I could place the above described reinforcement at Ladysmith *in nine weeks*.

With such a force added to the troops already in Natal, the whole triangle I have named (Northern Natal, between the Drakensberg and the Buffalo and Tugela Rivers) could be occupied and held. . . ." — (Report Vol. pp. 265-6.)

It will be seen that Lord Wolseley did not undertake generally to secure *the safety of the Colonies* with a reinforcement of 10,000 men, but stated his opinion that, if these troops were dispatched promptly, and were not forestalled by a Boer invasion, they could effectually defend Northern Natal.

On August 20 Lord Lansdowne replied from Ireland. On the 24th Lord Wolseley complained that we were preparing for war "in dribblets." This was in a letter addressed to the Secretary of State. Lord Lansdowne in his reply expressed the following opinions :—

"My own view is that we ought not to send further reinforcements to South Africa until it has become clear that the last proposals made by the South African Republic cannot be accepted as a basis for discussion. . .

"On the other hand, it is clear that we must be ready to send reinforcements whenever we are told that the negotiations have broken down, and neither you nor I can judge how soon this may be. . . .

"It may be possible to compel the Orange Free State to declare itself against us, and in that case you would, I take it, advance through it, and not via Natal. You

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ought to be *in utrumque paratus*, with a plan for each contingency.”—(Report Vol. p. 267.)

It is fair to remark upon this that no money was available, and that Lord Wolseley had strongly urged the importance of immediate action.

On September 1 Lord Wolseley advised the Secretary of State in these terms :—

“ I think we ought to be somewhat more prepared than we are at this moment as regards stores, equipment, saddlery, harness and hospital materials for the sudden mobilization of the force it is intended to send into the field in South Africa in the event of war ” (*ib.*).

We have now reached the time when General Buller put himself in communication with the Prime Minister. In a memorandum, dated September 5, he told Lord Salisbury :—

“ I am not happy as to the way things are going.

“ There must be some period at which the military and the diplomatic or political forces are brought into line, and in my view this ought to be before action is determined on—in other words, *before the diplomat proceeds to an ultimatum the military should be in a position to enforce it.* . . .

“ Before we operate against the Boers we should know the line on which we are to advance, i.e. whether by the Orange Free State or by Natal. (These are, for military reasons, the only possible routes.)

“ I have never yet had the route fixed, but I have gathered from Lord Lansdowne that he thinks the Natal route will prove the only possible one.”

General Buller proceeded to state that, for the invasion of the Transvaal by way of Natal, he

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would require a force of 50,000 men (this calculation was of course based upon the supposition that the Free State would not declare war), and he added—

“Until they” (i.e. the forces asked for, with the exception of 10,000 men on the lines of communication) “are mobile, the army could not advance, and consequently no ultimatum could be enforced; on the other hand, if an ultimatum is sent before they are mobile and can advance, the Colonies will be liable to invasion by the Boers if they can mobilize in, say, three weeks.”

In a memorandum of the same date addressed to Lord Wolseley General Buller said :—

“I am not aware what views are entertained by the Colonial Office as to the likelihood of the Dutch commencing hostilities.

“In my own opinion, a hostile act against the Cape Colony is unlikely, and the chance of one might be risked; on the other hand, I should say that hostile acts against Natal are not only possible, but probable; and I think our present force in Natal, though strong enough to protect itself, is not nearly strong enough to protect the colony.

“The question of whether this state of affairs is a fair risk to run is for the Government. I can only say that, from a military point of view, it is one which ought not to be allowed to exist a day longer than can be helped.”
—(Report Vol. p. 268.)

On the same date (September 5) a minute was addressed by Lord Wolseley to the Secretary of State for War, from which the following extracts are taken :—

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"The first intimation I have had that our negotiations with the Transvaal Government have reached an acute stage has come to me from Sir R. Buller. Asked by Lord Salisbury to state his views upon the military position in South Africa, he did so in a letter to me, which, as time pressed, he sent on in a letter to Lord Salisbury direct. . . .

"Whatever we now do is to lessen the present danger. I have not yet been told if the Indian contingent has been ordered to Natal, but assuming that this has been done, it could not, I believe, be 'in line' at Ladysmith at earliest before *October 18*.¹ I should not expect it to be concentrated there *before the 25th* of that month. . . .

"I have all along in this business urged the increase of our military force in South Africa, and I do so still, and would again urge the immediate despatch of a brigade of Guards to Natal. What keeps us back from doing so? We want no reserve men to do this. . . .

"I do not ask or wish to be informed as to any plans or action of the Government with which it is not considered desirable that I should be acquainted. But our position at present is fraught with serious danger, for the following reason: The Government are acting without complete knowledge of what the military can do, while the military authorities are equally without full knowledge of what the Government expects them to do, nor are they given authority to make such antecedent preparations as will enable them to act with the least possible delay."—(Report Vol. p. 269).

¹ The Boers first invaded Natal on October 13, entered the Colony in force on the 19th, and cut the railway at Elandslaagte on the same day. On the 20th the battle of Talana Hill was fought, and on the next day that of Elandslaagte. On the 22nd General Yule retired from Dundee, on the 24th the engagement at Rietfontein took place, and General Yule's force reached Ladysmith on the 26th.

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Lord Lansdowne, in the course of his evidence before the Royal Commission, declared that there was no ground for the complaint formulated by Lord Wolseley in the paragraph last cited (21207-8. *cf.* 21247). But it seems unquestionable that our system of preparation did raise doubts and suspicions of the most unfortunate kind in the minds of the military chiefs as to the confidence reposed in them by the Government.

The following passage conveys General Buller's impression of the events which succeeded :—

“As a result of this memorandum” (that which he had addressed to the Commander-in-Chief on September 5) “the Cabinet decided to send to India for a force of 5,500 men, which was the only organised body of troops that we could put in the field at the moment, without dislocating the whole of our mobilization arrangements. On learning this, I at once wrote to the Secretary of State for War, pointing out that a Commander would be wanted in Natal when those reinforcements should arrive, and adding that, from the military point of view, it would be wise to make provision at once for a further force in Natal. He replied by return of post, saying that he did not see how, in the face of the decision of the Cabinet, the War Office could be expected to do more at that moment. Matters again drifted. . . .

“On September 23 Lord Lansdowne asked me to place upon paper my reason for attaching so much importance to the adoption of the route through the Orange Free State for invasion of the Transvaal. Accordingly I sent him a memorandum on the subject, dated September 24. . . .

“The Cabinet met on September 29 ; and I was afterwards told by Lord Lansdowne that at the meeting the Government had decided to adopt the route by the

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Orange Free State, and to proceed with all military preparations excepting the mobilization of the men. On the 30th, therefore, I wrote to Lord Lansdowne that further delay in the provision for troops would be to incur a very dangerous risk, and pressed for the immediate despatch of the reinforcements by the best ships that could be obtained. 'I think,' I said, 'that if they delay the despatch of troops the Government will be incurring a very great responsibility.' In reply, Lord Lansdowne professed himself unable to call out the Reserves, or, in other words, to mobilize, before October 7. I reckoned from this date that the earliest embarkation of troops would take place about October 22, and that the Army Corps would be assembled at Cape Colony by December 22. I therefore urged that I should start for South Africa by the first steamer, on October 7; but eventually the 14th was fixed for my departure, and on the 9th I was gazetted Commander-in-Chief of the expedition"(14963, p. 170).

General Buller remarked, in this paragraph of his evidence, that he "had from the very first protested as strongly as possible against the occupation of Glencoe."

To return to the official correspondence. On September 16 Lord Wolseley addressed a letter to Lord Lansdowne, in the course of which he said :—

"Recent developments have shown that the Orange Free State is likely to prove a more serious and determined factor of opposition than was at first anticipated. And further, the position in the Cape Colony itself contains some very dangerous elements. In view of this, in view of the enormous importance in war of being as strong as possible, and in view of the fact that an overwhelming force, by shortening operations, is the cheapest in the end, I would strongly urge that, as we

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have the troops for the Army Corps, Cavalry division, and lines of communication to our hand, ready for immediate mobilization, we should mobilize them and send them out.—(Report Vol. p. 269.)

On September 22 “the sanction of the Secretary of State was given for the expenditure of about £600,000 to meet immediate requirements.”—(Sir F. W. Stopford, 942.)

On September 25 Lord Lansdowne addressed a memorandum to the Cabinet, in which he made the following observations :—

“It is obvious that if we continue to make all our preparations for attacking by way of Natal, we shall find it virtually impossible to alter our plans should the Orange Free State at the last moment declare itself hostile.

“The recent utterances of President Steyn may, I think, be taken as giving us fair notice that, if there is war, we shall have to reckon with both Republics.

“The question ought, I think, to be faced without further delay ; we cannot go on making our preparations in ignorance of a factor which should determine the strength of the force to be employed, the places at which land transport and supplies will have to be collected—in a word, our whole plan of campaign.”—(Report Vol. p. 270.)

There was an accompanying memorandum by Sir R. Buller, in which he dealt exhaustively with the respective advantages of the Natal and the Free State routes for an expedition. After alluding to the unsuitability of Durban as a port of debarkation, he said :—

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“The Orange Free State flanks the line of advance by Natal for some 200 miles, viz. from Ladysmith to Standerton, and even farther.

“Now, the Orange Free State may adopt three courses.

(1) They may declare themselves neutral and evince a benevolent neutrality to England.

(2) They may declare themselves neutral, with the determination of secretly helping the Transvaal as much as possible, and with the idea that the moment may come when it will be opportune to declare themselves on the side of the Transvaal.

(3) They may openly side with the Transvaal.

“A glance at the map will show that in the second case they will be dangerous ; and, in the third case, that it would be unwise to offer them the advantages of an advance by Natal, which would mean a flank march of 200 miles across their front.

“In my opinion, an advance by Natal in either of the second or the third cases would be a greater risk than ought to be incurred.

“It must be recollected that neither Natal nor the Transvaal will provide food for the force that advances on Pretoria. All it eats will have to be brought up from behind it. To advance on Pretoria and leave a hostile Free State to take its own time and opportunity for cutting the communications and stopping the flow of supplies would, I think, be running an unnecessary and most dangerous risk.

“I would, in such a case, far rather face the double distance and the possible hostility of the Cape Railway directorate than risk a march of 200 miles round a concealed enemy.

“An advance through the Orange Free State would give three seaports or bases, instead of one, and at the commencement enormously simplify disembarkation, concentration on the frontier, and supply when there . . .

“Consequently, I would most strongly urge that as

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soon as her Majesty's Government decide upon an expedition they should force the Free State to declare for one side or the other. If they declare for the other side, our route to Pretoria should be via Bloemfontein ; if they declare neutrality, they should be forced to give sureties that they preserve that neutrality. Failing to do this, they should be treated as hostile.

"A decision in the matter is urgently required, as it is essential the stores we are now ordering should be collected at ports that serve the route that may be adopted."

A memorandum from Lord Wolseley was communicated to the Cabinet at the same time, in which he said :—

"I fully endorse Sir R. Buller's opinion that our best line of advance upon Pretoria will be from the Orange River by the railway running through Bloemfontein, although I do not entirely agree in the reasoning upon which he apparently based it."—(Report Vol. pp. 270-1.)

On September 28 Lord Wolseley addressed a further minute to Lord Lansdowne. This contains the remark that "it is most essential we soldiers should fix upon a plan of campaign." The phrase appears infelicitous in the light of the date at which it was written. But the succeeding sentence explains it : "This we cannot do until we know what is to be the position of the Orange Free State" (*ib.*).

On September 30 authority was given to expend the money for "the full requirements" of one Army Corps, a Cavalry division, and line of communication troops.—(Stopford, 1026 ; 1031.)

On October 14 General Buller embarked at South-

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ampton. The following very interesting passage occurs in the evidence which he gave before the Royal Commission :—

“Q. Do I understand, Sir Redvers, that before your departure for South Africa, you received no letter of general instructions as to what the Government wished to be done ?

A. None.

Q. Nor on your arrival there ?

A. None.

Q. Or after your arrival ?

A. None—the usual letter of service.

Q. But that is a mere letter of appointment ?

A. Yes ” (15030-33).

After alluding to the fact that proper use was not made of the information available in the Intelligence Department, the Royal Commissioners comment in the following forcible terms on the non-existence of a strategical scheme :—

“ It is perhaps not altogether remarkable under the circumstances above described that no plan of campaign ever existed for operations in South Africa. It does not seem an unnatural supposition that a General who is sent out on an important expedition should receive written instructions showing the objective which the Government has in view. Lord Roberts stated that when ‘ Sir George White arrived in Natal he had no instructions in regard to the wishes of the Government as to any particular plan of campaign, nor was he aware of any general plan of operations in South Africa.’ From Sir George White and Sir Redvers Buller on the one hand, and from Lord Wolseley and Lord Lansdowne on the other, there is the assurance that no written

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instructions were given or received. Lord Lansdowne in his evidence expressed the opinion that it was 'by no means the rule that a General despatched upon an errand of the kind is furnished with full and precise instructions.' Further, that 'upon this particular occasion I cannot see that anybody was prejudiced by the absence of a definite plan of campaign.' Undoubtedly, if the provision of any plan of campaign interfered with the discretion of the General once the campaign had opened, it would be indefensible, but it is submitted that it is perfectly possible to safeguard the discretion of the General in the field, and yet to supply him with schemes of operations worked out by the most competent officers on the most reliable information, which he can adapt to the changing fortunes of the war.

"It is difficult to see the object of imposing upon the Commander-in-Chief the duty of preparing 'schemes of offensive operations' if something of the kind is not intended. Nor is it easy on any other interpretation to understand the expression in Lord Wolseley's Minutes of June 8, 1899: 'The general plan of campaign to be adopted is one that must thoroughly meet with the views of the general officer selected for supreme command,' and September 28, 1899: 'It is most essential we soldiers should fix upon a plan of campaign.'

"The only alternative is to rely on the impressions which a General may derive from personal interviews with superior authorities before he starts. That was the alternative adopted on this occasion. It resulted in the neglect for all practical purposes of the work of the Intelligence Division. For instance, on the question of holding Ladysmith, opinions had been formed which, whether correct or not in the light of subsequent experience, ought certainly to have been in the hands of officers entrusted with the defence of Natal, and, to cite only one other instance of the result of the course taken, we may refer to the plentiful crop of misunder-

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standings to be found in the statement made by Sir Redvers Buller.

In no other line of life would an agent be entrusted with a difficult and responsible task without some attempt at precise and careful definition of the object in view, and there seems to be no reason why military duty should be a solitary exception.—(Report of Commissioners, p. 23.)

General Buller arrived at Cape Town on October 30. Early in November he received “a series of telegrams from Mr. Rhodes and others at Kimberley, all crying out loudly for relief, and one of them hinting at surrender if relief were withheld” (14693, p. 171).¹ In consequence he “very reluctantly decided to divide his forces” and attempt to raise the siege of that town. He also abandoned the intention of advancing upon Bloemfontein, though only for the time (15101), and transferred his headquarters to Natal. The reasons for this action are summarized in the following passage of his evidence :—

“From the moment when I knew that the main army of the Transvaal had moved into Natal I felt convinced that something more than an advance on Bloemfontein would be needed to compel it to retire. A new theatre of operations, 1,000 miles distant from that contemplated by the authorities at home, had been opened by the Boer invasion of South Natal, and there was no

¹ General Buller expressly said that he “felt the fullest confidence in the military commandant, Colonel Kekewich” (14963, p. 172). It is fair to state under what impression Sir Redvers took a step which he thought unadvisable from a military point of view, but this, of course, implies no adoption of his opinion as to facts.

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escaping from the fact. I therefore decided upon every ground that the deliverance of South Natal must be my first object, combined, if possible, with the rescue of Sir George White's force for active operations. I should have preferred to have devoted every possible man of my forces to Natal, for in Natal lay my true objective, the principal force of the enemy" (14963, p. 172).

In Lord Wolseley's opinion Sir George White had "forced General Buller's hand." — (Report Vol. p. 275.)

We are discussing the Cabinet system of preparation at home, and it is, therefore, not necessary to carry the narrative of events further. Probably if there is one undisputed axiom in military science it is that those who are designing warlike operations should—

- (a) Know what they mean to do, and
- (b) Provide that it be done with promptitude, thoroughness, and decision. The reader must judge how far our method of procedure ensured that these principles should not be violated.

It may be urged that the weaknesses shown in the foregoing extracts are matter of ancient history. But what was the *cause* of the delays, and of the indecision? It was a certain co-ordination of the political and the military machinery which permitted

- (1) That conflicting expert advice could be offered to the Secretary of State for War.
- (2) That sufficient money was not granted when it was requisite.
- (3) That the political chiefs failed to realize the

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absolute necessity of making, *in time*, certain military preparations to which they were averse for reasons that in the result determined the whole character of the campaign though they had been accepted without regard to military science.

The question before the public is whether the co-ordination now proposed really removes the essential defects of the old methods. There is a feeling of relief which prompts people to say, "Oh, anything is better than the worst," when the worst is over. But that is not the mood in which to obtain the best results.

Is it possible for any one to say honestly, after a review of the circumstances, that the blame ought to be laid on the soldiers? Could any military chiefs prepare adequately for war without money? Successive Cabinets since 1890 had had the power to enforce the recommendations of the Hartington Commission, and no one at the War Office could have resisted the changes. A reforming Government could have exercised the power which has given effect to the findings of the Committee of Three at any time.

It is impossible to read the Report of that Committee without admiring the care and accuracy with which duties are assigned to military Departments on a scientific principle. There will be differences of opinions as to detail, e.g. whether the routine work of mobilization has been rightly entrusted to the Adjutant-General's charge, and whether "the

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question of the employment of railways in war " is rightly left to the Quartermaster-General's Department as now constituted, seeing that both these functions are assigned to the General Staff in Germany. But, broadly speaking, one may say that now for the first time in our Service duties have been so allotted as to suit the capacities which go together in certain classes of men. A soldier who has an aptitude for transport work will not have to spend a portion of his time on "ceremonial matters," "administrative arrangements connected with training and education," etc. Conversely, a man who has special competency in the work of the Adjutant's branch will not be put in charge of, say, the "preparation of training manuals on animal and mechanical transport." Hitherto, changes in the duties of Departments, "carried out in accordance with the predilections of individuals and not based upon any principle, have been frequent at the War Office, and have contributed to the confusion of its administration " (Report, Part III. p. 5). The most striking example is that of the Quartermaster-General's Department, which, "before the close of the Peninsular war, had assumed the functions of an Operations Staff,"¹ but after a series of confused, inconsistent "reforms," became, in 1888, a Directorate of Supplies and Transport, with the result that "the most important duties of an Operations Staff were not assigned to any branch of the Army,

¹ i.e., the work of the officers of the General Staff in the field during operations.

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and seem to have been forgotten"! (Report, Part II. pp. 21-2). Under the system at present before the country the power of whims and fads will cease in this respect and an intelligent, reasoned effort will be made to get the best out of the natural capabilities of soldiers.

But while the Committee of Three have proved their thorough mastery of the *military* difficulties caused by our method of administration, have they shown an equal knowledge of the political forces which their proposals will bring into play? Speaking with all diffidence, I urge that, in this respect, there is reason to regard their recommendations with profound misgiving. The Army Council has a fixed composition. Its President is the Secretary of State for War. Its "first military member" is the Chief of the General Staff. It is a military body, and at its meetings the advice of the General Staff will be offered to the Secretary of State. But there is a *condominium* and a "predominant partner." The supreme duties, the co-ordinating functions, of a General Staff will be undertaken by the Defence Committee. This body has not a fixed composition. Its president is the Premier. And while the Committee, on the one side, has the Prime Minister's ear, he, on the other, must be "personally committed" to its policy. Will it be possible to keep out the evils of divided responsibility under such a system?

And it is obvious that human nature is human nature just as much when it wears uniform as when it does not. The Service members of the Defence

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Committee cannot be blind to the fact that if they please the Prime Minister they will be marked for high employment. They cannot forget that if a General Election turns out their man, and his successor is pledged to a reversal or profound modification of his military and naval policy, they must, sooner or later, either swallow their avowed principles or resign. Are these considerations likely to strengthen their hands in opposing professional to political "exigencies"? No Prime Minister could tolerate for any length of time a Committee of this kind which was not in sympathy with his general policy. It would have to become, or be made, sympathetic. It would, in many cases, be committed by long association to the success of a popular policy of retrenchment. Its members would certainly divine those political purposes of the moment which the Prime Minister would dislike—to say the least of it—to see thwarted. Their tenure of office would depend on his parliamentary success. Is there any guarantee that, if war were within sight, they would see eye to eye with the General Staff, which would advise the Secretary of State for War under the influence of different promptings and associations? And if there were once more divided counsels before the Government on the military side, there would be the same excuse for irresolution and delay which existed in 1899—the cause of our disasters at that time would be in full operation. Political convenience would certainly once more overrule military necessities."

Is it not the case that the Committee of Three,

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seeing the situation with the eye of the Service man and not of the politician, has thought that at last it would deliver the controlling power—the Premier—to the naval and military experts, and has in fact delivered the military and naval experts completely to the Premier? The prospect is the more ominous when we remember the following passage in the Committee's third letter to the Prime Minister :—

“We wish once more to urge the vital importance to the Empire of maintaining the continuity of the work of the Defence Committee.

“We have before indicated our view of the incalculable value of the work of that Committee, due to the initiative and resource of the Prime Minister. We suggest that, with few exceptions, *none of your predecessors since 1815 was qualified by aptitude or inclination to undertake this special duty.*”

As I have ventured to suggest, the remedy seems to be definitely assigned responsibility—to the politician for the results of his political action, to the soldier for the success of his military plans. If the Service Section of the Defence Committee were “divorced”—to use a rather favourite phrase of the Committee of Three—from party politics completely, and subordinated to the military General Staff and the corresponding naval authority, with power to consult other Departments, and if the responsibility of seeking the advice of the General Staff were thrown upon the Cabinet when a campaign was probable, the Government would receive a military scheme drawn up with a single eye to

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military requirements, and everybody would know whose fault it was if that scheme were, on the one hand, rejected or mutilated, or, on the other hand, executed and found wanting.

CHAPTER IV

EQUIPMENT

IT is said that the public has a short memory. But hardly any one has yet forgotten the dangerous deficiencies of *matériel* which existed when hostilities commenced in 1899, and were revealed in the evidence given before the Royal Commission on the War. It is well known that these disclosures led to the appointment of a committee under the presidency of Sir Francis Mowatt, then Permanent Under-Secretary of the Treasury, that this committee recommended the expenditure of a large sum of money, and that the amount required has been supplied. The Committee of Three reported :—

“ The conditions which obtained in 1899, when stores of many kinds were at a low ebb, and the most strenuous efforts had to be exerted to replenish them at short notice, ought to be absolutely impossible in the future. There are now large reserves procured under the Mowatt programme, and their maintenance cannot be a matter of great difficulty ” (Report, Part III. p. 10).

Moreover, the Committee advise that “ the Inspector of Ordnance Stores, who is at present

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under the Director-General of Ordnance, should be transferred to the staff of the Inspector-General of the Forces, where his services as an independent critic would be extremely valuable" (*ib.*). He would then have the title of "Inspector of Ordnance and Equipment Stores."

The Commissioners on the War, alluding to one of the most serious results of the shortage in 1899, wrote, "It is obvious that, for a time, home defence was very inadequately provided for," and they described the condition of affairs at that period as a "dangerous crisis" (Report, p. 87). It may be thought that the warning received by the Government and the safeguards suggested by the Committee of Three are all-sufficient, and that it is now safe to let this subject pass into abeyance. Such a belief is founded upon two impressions which prevail very widely. They are—

(1) That the Government had before it, when war became probable, no authoritative intimation that really serious deficiencies of *matériel* were likely to exist.

(2) That owing to the chaotic state of military administration at the time the shortage had originated and increased without the knowledge of the Secretary of State for War.

Both these suppositions are erroneous.

Paragraph 103 of the Report of the Hartington Commission contains the following plain and emphatic warning :—

"We consider that it is necessary to take measures to prevent the undue depletion of stores, the danger

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of which has been pointed out to us. While it appears undesirable to enter into the question of the extent to which this depletion may or may not have taken place in the past, we are of opinion that safeguards against such a possibility are required. Various suggestions to this end have been made, and we consider that the question should receive the early attention of your Majesty's Government."

The Duke of Devonshire was a member of the Cabinet when war became probable in the summer of 1899, but even he seems to have forgotten the admonition which he and his colleagues had addressed to the Government in 1890.

And our deficiencies were *not* unknown to the Secretary of State.

Lord Lansdowne went to the War Office in 1895. In May, 1900, he drew up a memorandum, of which the following are the opening paragraphs :—

"Being dissatisfied with the condition of the Ordnance Department, I appointed as Director-General, in the beginning of 1899, Sir Henry Brackenbury, of whose administrative capacity I had had opportunities of judging while he was my colleague in India. Sir Henry addressed himself at once to the task of inquiring into the condition of our armaments and reserves of guns, ammunition, stores, and clothing. Before he had completed his investigation the war broke out, and brought to light the melancholy extent of our deficiencies.

"In December, 1899, he made his Report, and laid before me proposals for remedying a condition of things which he correctly described as full of peril to the Empire.

"The Report placed upon record the following facts—

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“We had a quite insufficient reserve of Horse and Field Artillery *matériel*; only one battery of Horse Artillery, and that converted to an experimental quick-firing system; and only eleven batteries of Field Artillery, of which two had been converted to an experimental system. Five of these were soon after sent to South Africa, and three were required for newly raised batteries, leaving at one time only one reserve battery in the country.

“The whole of our stock of field gun ammunition (500 rounds per gun) was absorbed by demands from South Africa at a very early stage in the war, and we had to borrow from India and from the Navy to keep up the supply demanded.

“We had only 500 sets of harness and 500 sets of cavalry saddlery in reserve and had to send more than that number of each to South Africa to make good losses in the first two months of the war. We had only 500 sets of Mounted Infantry saddlery in reserve, and had at once to order 11,500 sets to equip the force for South Africa, being forced to have recourse to the American market to obtain them.

“We sent to South Africa in the first two months of the war a third of our store of small-arm ammunition, and dispatched weekly 500,000 more rounds than the whole manufacturing power of the country could produce.

“We at once exhausted our reserve of infantry accoutrements; we had to borrow large guns from the Navy, machine guns from fortresses, boots and helmets from India, to buy 25,000 sets of mule harness, 17,000 tents, and 900 marquees.

“We had no reserve of hospital equipment; we had but one-fiftieth of the picketing gear required in South Africa, and a reserve of only eighty swords.

“The greater part of the armament of our fortresses being obsolete, its replacement by more modern guns had been approved. At the beginning of the war there was a small and quite inadequate reserve of spare

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B.L. guns ; there were no spare Q.F. guns. The ammunition stored only amounted to 200 rounds a gun abroad and 100 rounds a gun at home. The reserve was insignificant.

“ There was an urgent need of further storage accommodation ; the Ordnance Store buildings could barely hold the inadequate stocks in existence at the time, and there was no sufficient reserve of power of output of military stores in the country.

“ The whole of the firms manufacturing war *matériel* in the country have, indeed, been, during the war, employed in the fullest capacity, and the Ordnance Factories have worked night and day and on Sundays. All naval orders in the Laboratory and Carriage Department had, for a time, to be put aside.

“ It is, I think, abundantly clear, from Sir H. Brackenbury's Report, that *we were not sufficiently prepared even for the equipment of the comparatively small force which we had always contemplated might be employed beyond the limits of this country in the initial stages of a campaign. For the much larger force which we have actually found it necessary to employ our resources were absolutely and miserably inadequate.* The result has been that the Department, even by working under conditions which have nearly led to a breakdown, has been barely able to keep pace with the requirements of the army. We had at the outset of the campaign to send troops abroad insufficiently supplied with clothes and equipment ; and if we have been able to overtake arrears, it has only been by relaxing our specifications and by paying extravagant rates. *If other complications had supervened, a catastrophe would have been inevitable.*”—(*Minutes of Evidence*, vol. ii. p. 518.)

Lord Lansdowne had been Under-Secretary of State for War as far back as 1872, and was probably aware of the result which might be anticipated if urgent demands were made on the War Office.

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Speaking in the House of Lords on February 12, 1900, when the hostility of foreign nations was at its height, and the position of our forces in South Africa was extremely perilous, he said : " We have been struck with the inadequacy of our reserves of many kinds of stores, and we are determined that we shall no longer be open to that reproach."

What would have happened if we had been attacked at that time? Lord Wolseley said, in the course of his evidence :—

" If I am not outside my rights in saying so, I might remind the Royal Commission that whilst this war was going on in South Africa, if we had had anything like serious trouble from abroad, and we had mobilized our Army at home for service, we scarcely had any guns in England, a very small proportion of regular men, and that the whole of our Volunteers and Militia and Yeomanry remaining at home would have had guns of such an obsolete pattern that it would have been almost dangerous and criminal to ask men to stand up to them in the face of modern artillery, *although that was a point which had been urged on the Government by myself over and over again long before the war*" (8812).

Moreover in 1899

" Naval orders for ammunition had to be held in abeyance from the beginning of October. We borrowed ammunition from the Navy. . . . If in this war, in which only the land forces were engaged, we had, in order to keep up supplies, to borrow ammunition from the Navy, what would happen if the Army and Navy were both engaged?" (Brackenbury, 1599 ; 1613).

Could a corresponding state of affairs possibly arise under the system proposed by the Committee of Three?

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The following extracts are taken from the evidence of Mr. St. John Brodrick before the Royal Commission. The witness was referring, of course, to the conditions which obtained under his own scheme of reorganization.

“We have laid down exactly what troops we propose to send abroad. Parliament may at some time reverse it. We propose to send 120,000 men abroad. We then propose to mobilize a certain number of troops at home ; and I think, whatever disadvantages such an organization may have, it has the main advantage that you can, with regard to each Army Corps and with regard to each division, see at a glance whether they have or have not the requisite stores.

Q. But was not there the same position in 1899 ? You were acting then under the memorandum of Mr. Stanhope, which laid down that two Army Corps were to be ready for service abroad and one at home ; and yet the memorandum by Sir Henry Brackenbury brought out that reserves were lamentably deficient in almost every respect even for the two Army Corps ?

A. I think that the thing goes a little higher up than the Secretary of State. I was not, of course, a member of the Cabinet in which Mr. Stanhope sat, but my recollection is that *some question of equipping even that force for service abroad was pressed by the War Office but was not accepted, I will not say whether by the Treasury or the Cabinet—I do not know ; but I am aware that full provision of stores for that force was asked for and was not conceded at that time.*

Q. But that might happen under your system also for the 120,000 men ?

A. *It certainly could happen, but I think that the danger is minimized from the fact that the stores will be actually under the hands of the officers who have to use them”* (21669 seq.).

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Three points are made clear by the following passage in Lord Lansdowne's evidence. They are :—

(1) *That there was a dangerous delay in applying remedies after it first became known to the Secretary of State that "the whole question of the Ordnance Department wanted a thorough overhauling."*

(2) *That financial considerations prevented the safety of the country being assured in a reasonable degree.*

(3) *That efficiency was not safeguarded against certain perils due to "the personal equation."*

"Q. I think that it is not the case that the deficiency in stores was only brought to light by the war; you were dissatisfied with the matter before the appointment of Sir Henry Brackenbury?"

A. I was convinced that the whole question of the Ordnance Department wanted a thorough overhauling, and I brought in General Brackenbury, with the Commander-in-Chief's entire concurrence, as the man above all others who was best fitted to set matters in order.

Q. And do you think that deficiency of stores had been of long standing?

A. I think so. I think we were probably—as I believe Lord Wolseley said in a memorandum I quoted—better found at the beginning of the late war than we had ever been found before, but that does not prove we had enough.

Q. Is not that a fact that ought to have been brought before the Secretary of State of the day?

A. All these things mean an enormous expenditure of money; and if the Commission will consider the large expenditure that was incurred during the five years I was at the War Office, I think they will understand that we could not do everything at once.

Q. I mean, without any reflection on individuals, the system ought to have provided, and ought to provide in future, that a deficiency in stores to the serious

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extent that was brought out by Sir Henry Brackenbury's inquiry should not occur ?

A. I do not disagree.

Q. The system had not provided against that contingency in 1899 ?

A. I am not sure that I should admit that it was the system that was at fault.

Q. What was, then ?

A. The personal element enters into all those things ; you may have a head of a department who is easy-going and does not like putting forward proposals for the expenditure of millions when he knows there are other demands for the expenditure of other millions in front of him " (21281 seq.).

Another fact of the utmost importance is established by the following statement of Lord Lansdowne :—

"Q. Did not that minute (a document dated August 12, 1899, which had been put in evidence) bring out very distinctly that there were certain preparations which had been recommended by your military advisers which had not been made at that moment—in August ?

A. They might have been desirable. *Unless there had been political reasons for not making them.*

Q. That is your answer—that there were political reasons ?

A. Quite so (21148-9).

Q. *I only want to get it here that it was political considerations which delayed those preparations being made ?*

A. *Certainly*" (21157).

Is it possible to say, in view of this testimony, that financial considerations will never again be allowed to prevent the proper maintenance of our

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armaments and that political exigencies will never again be permitted to frustrate the preparations of the Government's military advisers ?

Under the system devised by the Committee of Three the Quartermaster-General would be "the holder and issuer of all military stores in peace and in war. The Master-General of the Ordnance would be the manufacturer, or the provider on demand, of all ordnance stores properly so-called (ordnance, arms, ammunition, vehicles and all articles of military equipment) which the Ordnance Factories can supply. . . . Other stores will be provided by the Quartermaster-General.

"The Quartermaster-General, as the custodian of all Army stores, should be responsible that the authorized reserves are maintained, and should so certify every year to the Army Council" (Report, Part III. p. 10).

There would also be the independent criticism of "the Inspector of Ordnance and Equipment Stores," to which reference has already been made. His reports would be sent to the General Officers Commanding concerned, and duplicates to the Inspector-General of the Forces. "The Inspector-General will prepare an annual report to the Army Council. This report should be framed in sections corresponding to the four military branches of the War Office." One of these branches controls Armaments and Fortifications, and is represented on the Army Council by the Master-General of the Ordnance.

In future, therefore, our efficiency with regard to stores and equipment will depend entirely upon the

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power and determination of the Army Council in dealing with the subject. In this connexion it is of the utmost importance to remember the following passages in the Report of the Committee of Three :—

“The responsibility of the Secretary of State to Parliament and to the country for the administration of the military forces will in no sense be diminished, *but it will be shared by the Members of the Council.*

“The decisions taken will stand, and executive orders will be issued in the name of the Council as a whole. It thus becomes the duty of any *Military* Member or Members of the Council who may dissent from a decision taken, either to resign office, or to accept a share of responsibility for the action involved. While, therefore, loyalty to the Service should prevent any Member from retaining office, if what he considers a vital principle of policy is contravened, *loyalty to colleagues will prevent the opinions of individual Members from becoming known outside the Council room. The dissent of any Member who does not thereupon resign is, by that fact, annulled, and he must accept his share of the consequent responsibility*” (Report, Part II, pp. 5, 6).

“Parliament and the country must in future hold the Army Council *responsible as a whole, through the Secretary of State, for the efficiency of the Forces.* The Council is one and indivisible, with aims and interests shared in common by all Members” (Report, Part II, p. 17).

The sentence last quoted certainly suggests a theological declaration and may have lingered in Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman's mind when he alluded to the utterances of the Committee of Three as “pontifical.”

Nothing is more probable, in the working of the

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system which we are considering, than that the Secretary of State for War should disagree completely with the Master-General of the Ordnance as to the sum which the latter ought to demand from Parliament for the maintenance of his reserves. What would happen in that case? It may be said that the Master-General would be supported by his military colleagues, of whom there are three in a Council of seven, and that he would then be backed by a majority. Even if this occurred, the Secretary of State would be under no obligation to resign or give way, and if he were supported by the Cabinet, the majority would be powerless. The Council would have reached an *impasse*. But it is by no means certain that the Master-General or the Quarter-master-General would be backed by his military co-assessors. It must be remembered that most heads of Military Departments have had experience of "the art of persuading financial authorities in the War Office and at the Treasury to increase the total of the Estimates" (Report, Part I, p. 10). If a large sum is allocated to one branch of military expenditure it is likely that other branches will be stinted in compensation. And that consideration would certainly carry weight with the Chief of the General Staff and the Adjutant-General.

Some readers may suppose that the Secretary of State would, with the modesty that results from diffidence, yield to his military colleague on a technical question of this sort. The following passages from the evidence given before the Royal Commission on the War show that the political

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President of the Council is not in reality likely to prove malleable in such circumstances.

The idea which has been developed in the appointment of an Inspector-General of the Forces is found in a suggestion made by Lord Wolseley in the course of his evidence before the Royal Commission on the War :—

“ I believe it to be quite possible to make certain that we are at all times ready to mobilize at home three Army Corps, and to embark two of them for foreign service as soon as ships can be provided to receive them. Make the Commander-in-Chief, as long as he is, as at the present moment, a non-political man, submit to Parliament every year, over his own signature, a certificate to say that he, on his own responsibility, certifies to the country that those three Army Corps are absolutely complete in every store that is requisite in order to mobilize them at the shortest possible notice, and the same thing as regards the two Army Corps being ready for active service abroad ” (8948).

Lord Esher, dealing with the “ impossible ” position of the Commander-in-Chief in his note to the Report of the Royal Commission, carried the proposal a step farther.

“ The only practical remedy is the abolition of the office of Commander-in-Chief, as recommended by the Hartington Commission, and the appointment of a General Officer Commanding the Army, removed from the War Office into a distinct building, possibly the Horse Guards, with a new definition, by Order in Council, of his duties and responsibilities. He might be trusted with the discipline of the Army, but his principal functions should be those of an Inspector-General of his Majesty's

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forces, and he should be responsible to the Secretary of State.

“His position would be analogous to that of an auditor in the region of finance. He would have to certify annually in writing as to the actual efficiency and condition of whatever military organization has been settled by the War Department and by Parliament. That is to say, if two Army Corps, or three, or six, are the large units agreed to by Parliament, he should certify annually that they are efficient and complete. Further, he should report and certify as to the condition of fortresses, ordnance, magazines, clothing, stores, equipment, hospitals, etc., and he should be held responsible for the accuracy of his certificates” (Report Vol. pp. 145-6).

But when the Commissioners invited the opinion of the two witnesses who had held office as Secretary of State for War upon the plan propounded by Lord Wolseley both commented upon it adversely. Lord Lansdowne said, with regard to the “certificate” :—

“I doubt whether it would really protect you. On the other hand, it seems to me to be too great a power to put into the hands of the Commander-in-Chief. You put him in the position of being at any moment able to refuse to sign this certificate, and thereby forcing the Secretary of State for War to go to Parliament with an admission that things are not as they should be. I think that would be likely to create very inconvenient relations between the Secretary of State and the Commander-in-Chief, and I should prefer to leave matters as they are” (21450).

Mr. Brodrick's criticism took the following form :—

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“ When I come to think it over, it would be supplying foreign powers certainly with an exact statement of our defences every year. If it was not given to Parliament I do not think it would be a very useful thing. If it was withheld from Parliament the Secretary of State would be pressed in every Parliamentary discussion as to whether or not he had got the certificate of the Commander-in-Chief on some particular point. Let me take one illustration of the sort of thing which would reasonably occur. Supposing the reserve of rifles ought to be 500,000, the Secretary of State may say, ‘ We have no war in prospect, the reserve is rolling up at a very considerable pace at the existing rate of manufacture, and I am satisfied with it. I cannot pay an enormous additional price in order to induce firms to lay down additional plant to complete the whole thing in a year and a half ; I must be satisfied to do the thing in three years ’ . . . To put the Commander-in-Chief in the position of saying at any moment, ‘ I shall refuse you your certificate if you do not take my views,’ would be, I think, very difficult in the working of two high officials ” (21665).

It will be seen at once that the civilian Minister who is responsible to Parliament would probably decide without hesitation whose judgment should prevail as to the adequacy of a given reserve of military stores. And it is unlikely that subsequent Secretaries of State would be more willing than Lord Lansdowne “ to go to Parliament with an admission that things are not as they should be.”

Under those circumstances, what would happen if the Cabinet desired to persevere in economies which the Inspector-General reported to be damaging to efficiency, and the Quartermaster-General, as “ the custodian of all Army stores,” wished to oppose ? Our

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past history shows plainly that such a situation is not merely hypothetical. Apparently, the Inspector-General's report would go no farther than the Army Council, if the Government "came to think it over," and decided that to publish it "would be supplying foreign powers certainly with an exact statement of our defences." It must be borne in mind that the real cause of our unreadiness in South Africa in 1899 was the refusal of the political chiefs to spend money upon military preparations *and supplies* in accordance with the recommendations of their official advisers. It seems that under the new system the Inspector-General, when he had lodged complaints, would have discharged his duty and would have no more to say on his own initiative, and that the Quartermaster-General, if his position became unsatisfactory in view of depletion of supplies and the attitude of the Secretary of State, might either "grin and bear it" or resign under the proviso that "loyalty to colleagues will prevent the opinions of individual members from becoming known outside the Council room."

And it has been proved that politicians, yielding to official optimism, are extremely bad judges of military requirements in spite of the confidence which appears in the foregoing extracts. I do not wish, at this stage of the discussion, to revert at length to our shortcomings in equipment; but it must be remembered that almost every kind of store was lacking or defective. Every one has heard of the notorious scandal about the rifle ammunition. Sixty-six million rounds or there-

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abouts of our reserve was non-effective for purposes of war. With regard to the 200,000 Lee-Enfield rifles, the sighting of which was incorrect, it is fair to say that in Lord Roberts' opinion, the error in construction "did not practically make any difference" (10575. *seq.*). But the subjoined leading instances, from the evidence of General Brackenbury and others, show to what an extent neglect prevailed, and how unfit we were, in consequence, to undertake a campaign of any importance.

"We were 326 machine guns deficient of the authorized number" (15999). "Saddles had to be bought in France, Austria, Germany, and Belgium, as well as in America and Canada" (*ib.*). "Many of the vehicles for the Army Service Corps were old, obsolete vehicles, which were all very well just to rub along on the very good roads in this country, but they were perfectly impossible in South Africa" (1600). "We had to send all our serviceable general service wagons out of the country, and we had to order large numbers of vehicles, and of course they take a long time to make. We had only 1,700 sets of mule harness, and we had to buy an equipment of 25,000 single sets from the trade before December 15" (*ib.*).

"As regards hospital equipment, we had no reserve, and we had only material for one general and two stationary hospitals in our mobilization equipment, and by December 15 we had sent out five general hospitals and were asked for a sixth (1602).

"Our reserves of clothing were inadequate to meet even peace requirements; and before the war broke out I had asked for a reserve to be prepared equal to about six

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months' ordinary supplies, *which would cost £320,000, and that demand had received no answer* (1604).

"We could not get sufficient helmets, and we had to borrow them from India. We could not even get sufficient boots, and we had to borrow boots from India (1611).

"A great deal of the machinery in the Ordnance factories urgently needed replacement by labour-saving machines, and we had no real reserve of power of output in the country (1613).

"I think I ought to say that we had constantly asked for money, and I think I might give you, as a typical example, the first item in this statement. . . . All our vehicles in this country are vehicles suited for European warfare, and that means for warfare in countries where there are good roads, and where you have horse-draught. The first thing that had to be done for all the vehicles for South Africa was to put on South African brakes, to make them suitable for transport in that country—very powerful screw brakes ; and the second thing was to convert all carts and wagons to mule draught, and that required the provision of mule harness. Now we knew it would take some weeks to convert these carts and wagons to ox or mule draught and to get harness for them. . . . On July 26 the Army Mobilization Board decided that the alterations necessary to fit vehicles which were to be sent out from this country with pole draught and screw frame brakes should be done in this country, and also that the new harness for the vehicles which were to be sent out from this country should be provided here. The Secretary of State declined at this stage to sanction any expenditure on preparations for the despatch of an Army Corps for South Africa. The cost of these services, for which authority was required, was conversion of carts and wagons, £9,000, and conversion and provision of harness, £8,650. On August 31 the Board considered it useless to postpone any longer these services, and

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directed the Director-General of Ordnance again to ask for authority. On September 1 the Director-General of Ordnance again asked for authority. On September 5, in putting forward a schedule of requirements, he pointed out that *this service would take ten weeks*, and said the sanction of these items should be given at once on account of the time required to manufacture and obtain them, and that *if put off till the force is ordered to mobilize it would be impossible to guarantee their being ready in time*. On September 5 he reported that the authority had not yet been received. On September 8 he again reported no authority received. On September 20 the Assistant Under-Secretary informed the Board that the Secretary of State was prepared to consider the expenditure necessary to meet the most pressing requirements. On September 21 the Board met and considered the schedule containing the provision for this Service. On September 22 the Director-General of Ordnance was informed that the Secretary of State had sanctioned the expenditure, and orders were given the same day for the work to proceed " (1630).

Hostilities, as everybody knows, commenced upon October 13. No foresight seems to have been used in calculating how war demands would affect stocks in existence in the country :—

" I think we have shown you what the existing reserves were, how trifling they were. . . . We had to go to America and to Germany for tents. We got a number of tents even from India."—*Brackenbury*, 1666.

" Even such things as felling axes we could not get in sufficient quantities in this country " (*ib.*).

" The difficulties were immense in getting things. We had the greatest possible difficulty in getting tents at all up to our requirements. There are other items which occur to me here, pick-axes and spades—we

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had the greatest difficulty in getting these in the trade—in fact, generally it was so” (1669).

Other responsible officers besides General Brackenbury had made representations which would have been invaluable to the nation if action had been taken on them. It was not the fault of the Director-General of Ordinance that the force besieged in Ladysmith possessed no heavy mobile guns except those which were removed from the fleet and arrived barely in time. He told the commission—

“4·7-inch guns were among the weapons we always wanted to have as movable armaments, *but we never could get them*. The 4·7-inch guns that we had were all part of the armament of fortresses, on fixed mountings, and we had to take the guns off those fixed mountings, *to that extent denuding our fortresses*, and invent carriages for them and send them out” (1680).

General Sir Richard Harrison, the Inspector-General of Fortifications, told the Royal Commission:—

“The Commanding Royal Engineer is Sir Elliott Wood. As soon as he was appointed, *his duty was to find out what the nature of the campaign was to be from the Chief of the Staff*. There was no Chief of the Staff for this war at the commencement, and we discussed together what the possibilities of the war were (1849).

We anticipated that the war would be a big one. We knew that there were very large rivers to cross, and I thought we ought to have more pontoons, to take one case, than we actually possessed; and we sent out a great many more; we sent out, in fact, all we could lay our hands on in the country . . . (1856).

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Q. Then were you given a special grant for the purpose?

A. No; we collected all the pontoons that were scattered about in the country for instructional purposes, and sent them out eventually to follow up the actual pontoons; to reinforce, so to speak, the pontoons in the possession of the troops . . . (1863).

There were a certain number issued for educational purposes, more or less condemned ones, old pontoons; any that we could collect we sent out (1866).

Q. But that denuded the country both of its reserves and also of all those pontoons for instructional purposes?

A. Yes.

Q. Therefore, in order to replace them, you had eventually to purchase new ones?

A. We had to get money and buy new ones. It is rather a long process, because pontoons are not an article of store; you cannot go into the market and buy them; you have to have them made specially, and, therefore, it took time to get them" (1867-8).

For certain kinds of expeditions, "like the expedition to the Crimea or Suakim and others, it is advisable to have a certain quantity of light railway reserve, so that you can send it out quickly at the commencement of the expedition, and it is for that purpose that we hold in hand this certain proportion of light railway stock. We want more of it, and I have been trying very hard to get it for some years . . . (1877.)

Q. You only have about $3\frac{1}{2}$ miles?

A. We have very little (1878).

Q. Obviously $3\frac{1}{2}$ miles of light railway is not enough?

A. No; it is not nearly enough. Our present reserve is nothing at all.

Q. What would you call enough?

A. I think if we had about 300 miles of railway" (1891-2).

The difficulty about the pontoons was due to the

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fact that the Inspector-General of Fortifications "*did not get any authority to spend money,*" in time (2041).

The failure to make a timely provision of money for war purposes cost the country dear. Colonel Sir W. D. Richardson was Deputy-Adjutant General for Supplies and Transport for South Africa. He arrived at Cape Town on October 3, 1899—ten days before the war began. The following passages are taken from the evidence which he gave before the Royal Commission :—

"Q. What was the condition of matters that you found when you reached South Africa ?

A. When I reached Cape Town I found that they had a very small Army Service Corps establishment indeed, that the few supplies they had received had been forwarded to the garrisons which had been sent to Mafeking, to the Orange River, to De Aar, to Naauwpoort, and to Stormberg, and that, owing to the large number of Uitlanders who were coming down from the Transvaal and from the Free State to the Cape ports, almost all local supplies were being rapidly consumed by the civil population, so that everything was at a famine price. . . . (3374).

Q. What did you do to meet that situation ?

A. We telegraphed home for the supplies we wanted. We kept cabling home for the supplies, stores, and equipment we wanted and could not get locally. Of course we bought locally, *but at famine prices* (3380).

Q. Did you get much at the very high prices ?

A. It was absolutely necessary to buy on the spot, so that we might be beforehand with the troops, because when once the troops landed we could not send up stores and troops at the same time, as there was only one single line of railway ; therefore it was absolutely

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necessary that I should get stores up to De Aar and to the Orange River on the way to Kimberley before the troops came, so I bought *virtually at any price I could*.

Q. And the supplies which you mentioned were ordered from England at the beginning of September would not have been there in time ?

A. They did not arrive until the first week in December.

Q. So that all the preparations that had to be made before the arrival of the First Army Corps troops had to be made by you on the spot ?

A. They had to be made on the spot, and of course put up prices to a very great extent. We were competing with a large civil population. When once you get prices up it is very difficult to get them down again " (3386 *seq.*).

Heavy expenditure was incurred in Natal for similar reasons. Lieutenant-Colonel H. G. Morgan was Director of Supplies for the Field Force there. He said :—

" I had to make the meat contract for the Army in Natal, and that was made just after Sir George White arrived. We advertised for tenders, and did not get a single reply. I then had to send for those who, I thought, could possibly carry out the contract, and we were practically at their mercy. We were not in a position to carry out the contract ourselves, because we had not sufficient *personnel*, and we were practically at their mercy, but we managed to make a contract, after a good deal of trouble, at 9½*d.* a lb. for fresh meat, and 7*d.* a lb. for frozen meat " (18347).

With regard to the quality of certain supplies, General French said laconically : " Many casualties

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were caused by inferior saddles and cheap blankets—a very false economy” (17129, head “Marching”).

Perhaps the most serious matter in connexion with equipment was our dependence on the foreign market. General Brackenbury said:—

“During the war I was authorized to go abroad for equipment, which was badly wanted for the Artillery at home, because the Ordnance factories and our own firms were full up with as much as they could do making Field Artillery equipment. . . . I had any amount of rubbish offered me; but there was one equipment which seemed good, so I sent out my chief inspector and somebody else to see these guns, to see them fire, and examine them, the result being that we got from a firm in Germany eighteen batteries of real quick-firing guns, and we are at the present moment, I believe, the only people who have got them except France” (1755).

That is satisfactory as far as it goes, but Lord Wolseley had to tell the Commission that “Krupp refused absolutely to supply guns” (8709), and that willingness to furnish us with munitions of war was not the rule.

“We were sorely in want of guns, ammunition, carts, wagons, tents, clothing, boots, shoes, saddles, and fifty other articles that I might easily mention. Every manufacturer of these articles in England was working in full blast for us, and still they could not keep us supplied with all we wanted. . . . *The foreign markets were positively closed to us because we were at war with the Boers; at least, it was because we were at war, and I assume it was because we were at war with the Boers. . . . We must not depend upon outside countries for help in this matter*” (8704).

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This is another example of the effect of our system of Free Imports, which discourages our manufacturers from extending and renewing their plant, because their products may at any time be undersold by "dumped" protected goods. In peace time they have not secure possession of the home market, and, as a result, we depend upon the foreigner for supplies in war.

It is not suggested that there is no other aspect of the case, and that confusion and failure were universal. The mobilization of the troops in this country was successfully carried out. The victualing of the troops in South Africa was well managed, thanks, largely, to the energy and ability of certain officers on the spot. The sea transport was extremely well worked. The credit for this is due to the Admiralty, which acted with dispatch and decision from the first.

"On the 28th (September) the Quartermaster-General sent details of the force proposed to be embarked, but it was only mentioned as proposed, giving all the ports of embarkation, the whole thing mapped out, and upon receipt of that their Lordships decided right away, without waiting for a formal requisition, to engage tentatively two large freight ships belonging to the Union Castle Company. Those ships would carry 1,500 men each, and would otherwise have gone to the Continent and embarked cargo. They were engaged and held in readiness. It is impossible to engage a ship beforehand without incurring expenditure, of course. . . . The Admiralty incurred the responsibility absolutely, and a very heavy sum."—Mr. S. J. Graff (9540-1-2.)"

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The following passage from General Brackenbury's evidence ought not to be forgotten by the nation :—

“Q. I suppose you remember that in 1895, according to the popular idea, we were not very far off a rupture with France ?

A. Yes.

Q. And later on, in 1898, the same thing occurred ?

A. Yes; according to the popular idea.

Q. Have you any reason to suppose that our preparations for war at that time were any better than they were for the outbreak of this war in 1899 ?

A. I have no reason to suppose that they were better ” (1714 *seq.*).

Mr. Brodrick speaking in the House of Commons, on *May 17, 1901*, said :—

“I give the House this guarantee, that there is no danger in saying now, after fifteen years, that if a Committee of Parliament had sat upon the condition of our stores and armaments when the gauntlet was thrown down to Russia in 1885 by Mr. Gladstone, that committee would have given to the House of Commons, and could even now give to the House of Commons and the country, food for reflection *which the committee which is going to sit on the existing war will not find means to do.*”—*Times* Report.

And so completely may leading politicians be at fault in this matter that even Mr. Balfour, speaking on January 9, 1900, said :—

“Whatever criticism may hereafter pass either upon the Government, or upon the War Office, or upon our Generals in the field, or upon any branch of the service connected with the war, I do not believe it will ever be proclaimed that the Army we have sent into the field

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is inadequately equipped with any modern requirement or any requirement which the progress of invention has shown to be necessary in the case of a modern army." —*Times* Report.

In view of these most significant declarations, I venture to urge, in spite of the objections mentioned by Lord Lansdowne and Mr. Brodrick, that the annual report of the Inspector-General of the Forces should, as a matter of routine, be presented to Parliament. If no serious deficiencies are disclosed, there will be no culpability to fear. And those who are acquainted with the success obtained by adequate General Staff arrangements abroad will certainly not be alarmed by the prospect of divulging to Continental Powers weaknesses of ours of which they have not been informed. The Inspector-General will never startle Berlin by unexpected revelations. I further urge that the four military members of the Army Council should deal with the section of the Inspector's report which refers to their respective departments in a covering report not written in accordance with the doctrine that the Council, as one and indivisible, promulgates all necessary truth after the suppression of individual opinion, but with a single eye to the efficiency of the *personnel concerned and the sufficiency of the funds available*. In this manner it will be made plain whether the shortcomings of a military Department are due to its own errors or have been caused by preponderance given to financial or political considerations.

To turn for an instant to the lighter side of the posi-

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tion in 1899. Superficially, General Brackenbury's statement that on the outbreak of hostilities, the war equipments for "a Field Army under the Regulations,"¹ of "two Army Corps, one Cavalry division, and lines of communication troops" were complete (1593-4) does not seem consistent with Lord Lansdowne's declaration that "we were not sufficiently prepared even for the equipment of the comparatively small force which we had always contemplated might be employed beyond the limits of this country in the initial stages of a campaign." The explanation is perfectly simple. "What we had was the mobilization equipment ready to enable the troops to take the field, but there were no special reserves for up-keep of that army if it went to war" (1597). The fighting force, in fact, was ready to take the field—but it was unable to stop there! One almost expects to find that Mr. W. S. Gilbert had forestalled the War Office in devising this situation.

In one respect inspection cannot ensure efficiency in carrying out operations. It was shown in evidence before the Commissioners on the War that in almost every campaign *special* stores are needed. The requirements of a force in an open tropical country as regards transport, guns, clothing, and food are different from those of an expedition in a mountainous region where heavy ordnance cannot be conveyed and cavalry cannot operate. If we had to dispatch an army to protect our interests

¹ These "Regulations" will be explained in a subsequent chapter.

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in the valley of the Yangtsekiang its *special* supplies would not be in any way similar to those needed if the scene of operations were Thibet or Abyssinia. The British forces may be called upon to act at any time in any quarter of the globe. It would be the most extravagant folly to attempt to maintain a reserve of every article of equipment that might be needed in any conceivable contingency. Yet the supply of *special* equipment and transport *in due time* may very probably determine, if not the outcome, the duration of a campaign and what it costs in men and money; to obtain the money *beforehand* for such supplies the soldiers concerned must make head against the natural reluctance of the politicians to ask for public money and account for its expenditure. Nothing could be more instructive in this respect than the history of our preparations in 1899. I leave the reader to judge whether a military body which is, and long has been, subject to political influences of the most powerful kind or a non-political military body which speaks with exclusive authority and throws responsibility on the Cabinet when it has done so is the more likely to obtain the necessary funds in time. I desire again to emphasize the point, overlooked in 1899, that military requirements are a "fixed quantity" based upon factors which *do not vary* with the changes in the political situation.

Before leaving the subject of equipment, it is of vital importance to refer to the alteration now made in the status of the head of the Army Medical Service. This appears to be a retrograde step. The

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Army Council created according to the recommendations of the Committee of Three corresponds very closely to the old War Office Council. The latter body was reconstituted by Mr. Brodrick in 1900, and he then brought into it "the Director-General Army Medical Department, for medical and sanitary questions." This put the head of the medical staff in direct contact with the Secretary of State for War. No doubt Mr. Brodrick was influenced by the atrocious scandals that had occurred in connexion with the hospital service in South Africa, and certain other scandals which were of long standing at home.

It is a commonplace of war that disease thins an army more than the enemy, and military efficiency, quite as much as humanitarian sentiment, requires that the medical service should maintain the highest possible standard of excellence. It is difficult enough at any time to graft one profession on another, and to secure that the medical branch shall flourish in the military organization. But it cannot be expected that *a soldier* should realize, and represent to a political chief, the needs of the medical service as a doctor can. Naturally the head of a military department sees the military requirements, which he thoroughly understands and with which he is familiar, in much more vigorous relief than the medical needs which may be brought to his notice, and he cannot be expected to urge that available money should be spent on the latter when the former, in his view, have not been met.

The Committee of Three wrote :—"Sanitation in

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war and in peace is closely bound up with discipline, and we, therefore, consider that the proper position of the Director-General of Army Medical Services is, as we have laid down, under the Adjutant-General, whose duties are specially connected with the person of the soldier " (Report, Part III, p. 6). One cannot help feeling that, among officers, the man who has attained a high position as a disciplinarian is hardly of the type which is likely to have a sympathetic insight into the position created by modern surgical developments and the needs that arise from them. Nothing should be done to check the activity of the recently formed Advisory Board of the Army Medical Service, whose generously given assistance has accomplished and is promoting invaluable reforms, and has earned the gratitude of the country (see e.g. 11829, *seq.*), and the civil arm of the medical profession will scarcely be encouraged in its co-operation by the suggested change.

Reluctant as I am to quote more extensively from the evidence given before the Royal Commission, it seems to me absolutely necessary to remind the reader of the condition of affairs which had been reached *before* the head of the Medical Department had been brought into direct touch with the Secretary of State, and ask him to judge whether we can safely revert to the position which made such results possible.

Mr. A. D. Fripp, C.B., C.V.O., was one of those "who, with Sir Frederick Treves and others, volunteered for South Africa" (11813). He "travelled about a good deal and visited nearly

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all the hospitals in Cape Colony, including Kimberley and Mafeking, and in the Orange River Colony up as far as Kroonstad, and most of them in Natal as far as Ladysmith" (11817). Mr. Fripp gave his impressions to the Royal Commission in the following terms :—

"One of the things that I should like to be allowed to speak openly about here is the fact that all the senior officers, from the principal Medical Officer, who was the most charming, delightful gentleman (Sir William Wilson), but from him downwards, through all the senior officers, they are impressed with a sort of feeling, first of all, that their service is looked at askance, that their branch is secondary; and, next, that they must not approach any General Commanding Officer, and certainly not if he has got a title, without their knees chattering together with alarm and fright; they must not think of advising him that it really would be for the good of the army if a camp was not pitched on a certain proposed site, because it is covered by stinking horses in various degrees of decomposition. . . . There is a general shirking of taking any responsibility of the kind, taking any initiative, and daring to do anything that is not already laid down in the Regulations. And I daresay that that general fear has a good deal of foundation in what has happened to individuals who have dared to exceed Regulations in the past" (11822).

Mr. Fripp gave the following example (11843) :—

"My present house-surgeon at Guy's was out in the war in South Africa, and he was told that he was to attend to some typhoid patients in a tent, so, of course, did attend to them. Three of these typhoid patients were very bad indeed, and he was told to sleep in the

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tent. He said to his superior officer: "I suppose I need not sleep actually in the tent, need I, I may sleep with my head outside the tent, or I may sleep just outside, with a string attached to my toe, so that if either of the patients wants me, he can pull it, and it will wake me up?" and it eventually ended in his being told that if he did not sleep actually in the tent *he would be liable to be shot*, which is ludicrous. The sequel is that the poor boy went down with enteric at exactly the right incubation time afterwards" (11843).

Professor Ogston, of Aberdeen University, went out to South Africa in December, 1899. He told the Royal Commission:—

"There were at Modder River on one occasion 800 men, sick and wounded, brought back from Jacobsdal and the Paardeberg direction in one day. They had to be accommodated in two field hospitals, which had only equipment for one hundred men each (10956).

"Disinfection, one might almost say, was absolutely unknown. The men know nothing about disinfectants; they did not even know which were good and which were bad. They had no training in keeping themselves disinfected; in fact, it seemed to me that many of them looked upon it as a species of cowardice if they attended to such things as avoiding infection—a sort of shirking of duty. The hands were not disinfected, the utensils that the patients used, and so forth, were not disinfected; when they were emptied out into pits they were not disinfected, and the wards were not disinfected. In one hospital, made to contain fifty-three beds, and which accommodated fifty-three cases, almost exclusively of typhoid, the only source of disinfection for the orderlies was one enamelled basin containing creoline and water, which was placed in the verandah at the exit from the hospital, and this they might or might not use, as they thought proper" (10997).

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Sir Frederick Treves said of the medical organization :—

“It is not suitable for work in the field ; it is no doubt admirable as it stands on paper. It is full of an enormous number of safeguards apparently based upon the impression that the officer put in charge of a hospital is likely to be incapable, and that his incapacity will be minimized by restrictions of all sorts (11975).

“It is an exceedingly extravagant service ; it is worked in the most costly possible way. You obtain an officer who is supposed to be a specially qualified man, who receives high pay, and charge pay, and then he is put to do work which is practically much better done by an ordinary clerk for a pound or so a week (11977).

“I would rather urge this, that there is no other provision than this—an ambulance that can only go on a road. This is the point. In a war on the continent the ambulance Mark V, would be admirable, because there there are proper roads ; but there is no provision for an ambulance to go over a rough country.

Q. The evidence was that Mark V stood the work across country ?

A. Yes ; the carts stood the work, but the patients did not ” (12051-2).

At Aldershot, “ the third station hospital is not fit to be a hospital. The military hospitals do not come up to the standard of a workhouse infirmary, and they ought to be at least brought up to that level ” (12113). Mr. Fripp said, “ Several of them have not got an operating theatre at all. . . . One, for instance ” (the place mentioned by Sir Frederick Treves), “ has a high road running through the middle of it. The operating theatre is on the one side of the road and the instruments have to be kept, by regulation, on the other side. The one side is called the Hut Side, because it consists of old disused Crimean huts, and the other side is called

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Union Side, because, as I said in my report, it was in its palmy days a union or workhouse, until it got too dilapidated for that, when it was turned over to be a military hospital " (11889).

In South Africa " we were carrying about with us instruments which I should have thought would only be found in museums."—(Treves, 12145.)

"We took about medicines that were in bottles in the most cumbrous form, and that had been in the bottles for twenty years possibly. It is really a serious complaint ; we had to drag this useless chemist's shop all over the country, packed up in the most ludicrous and extravagant way. Tabloids, or any such concentrated preparations as are used now, would have put the whole outfit into a twelfth part of the space (12168).

"I had to report upon hospitals in which I myself actually witnessed the washing up of all the plates, dishes, knives and forks in the sink in which the bed-pans were washed out, many of the patients having typhoid fever. . . . That applies to two separate hospitals out of twenty-two. . . . As to the temperature of these hospitals : during the cold weather we could not find a ward up to fifty degrees, and that is hardly the temperature for a sick man to be living in (12180).

'At Canterbury there is no operating theatre, and there are no suitable instruments. The Military Hospital is falling into the earth ; there is nothing in the place at all except the four walls and the beds. If anything happens there, if a man meets with a bad accident, it is so much the worse for the man, as there is no proper outfit in the hospital. There are hospitals of over 200 beds with no surgical outfit, so that it cannot be said that the military surgeon is encouraged in the Service " (12202).

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Lord Roberts told the Royal Commission :—

“Quartermaster-General’s training is needed. I remember finding a hospital at Bloemfontein pitched immediately over the main water supply” (10452).

Surgeon-General Jameson said with regard to hospital orderlies :—

“When our establishment had been exhausted, we had to use a good many non-commissioned officers and men from regiments ; some commanding officers sent us *good men, and others sent us, I think, their worst*. . . . Some improvements took place, when it was shown that it was a great mistake to send their worst men” (11525).

One is glad to read of that “improvement.” But it would probably be impossible to measure the suffering and despair which is implied by the brief sentence printed in italics. Can one possibly say, in view of these facts, that reaction is permissible in dealing with the Medical Service ?

CHAPTER V

THE NEW MACHINERY

IN future the apex of our military organization will be the Defence Committee, which, as we have seen, "assisted by a small Secretariat, will deal with questions of national defence, and will foresee Imperial requirements," while the Army Council, "freed from routine, will find the time and the means to direct military policy, to foresee military requirements, and to frame the measures of organization, the neglect of which in time of peace entails disaster or ruinously expensive improvisation in war" (Report of the Committee of Three, part iii. p. 31). Important as the controlling power of the Army Council is under this definition, it concerns only one of the services, and is therefore necessarily subordinate to the "co-ordinating head of all the departments concerned in the conduct of, and in the preparations for war," which will "fulfil the main functions of a General Staff, as they are now understood all over the civilized world by statesmen who have considered the necessities and conditions of Empire" (part i. p. 1).

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Since the Defence Committee is to undertake these supreme duties, it is well worth while briefly to consider its evolution. It is now in its third form.

The "old" Cabinet Committee was frequently mentioned before the Royal Commission on the War. It "acted mainly with respect to the Estimates, and also in resolving questions which arose between the War Office and the Admiralty" (Brodrick, 21732). Mr. Balfour, in the House of Commons in 1900, explained with regard to it:—

"The Committee of Defence is a Committee of the Cabinet, and does not differ essentially from other Committees of the Cabinet. It neither removes responsibility from the Cabinet as a whole, nor from any of the Ministers responsible for the departments either of the Army or of the Navy. Of course the Committee obtains the best information it can from experts and from others. Like other Cabinet Committees, it keeps no records. . . .

"The subjects they take into consideration are any subjects delegated to them by the Cabinet, dealing with the interests of the Army or the Navy, or those two services taken in conjunction."

The general impression left on the minds of the soldiers who gave evidence before the Royal Commission was that this Committee was not very active and not easily accessible.

It was reconstituted at the instance of Mr. Brodrick in 1903, and, as reorganized, plainly foreshadowed the Committee which is now, in conjunction with a Secretariat, to assume the functions of a General Staff. The Defence Committee, in its second form,

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had a composition and duties different from those of the "old" Committee. The Commander-in-Chief and the Director-General of Mobilization and Intelligence were members of it. It had, said Mr. Brodrick,

"the great advantage of combining with members of the Cabinet the most influential representatives, experts, of the *two* services, and it also calls in, as occasion needs, representatives either of the India Office or Colonial Office, or any other department affected. The effect of the deliberations of this Committee may be very extensive. It is obvious that their decision, so far as a decision of any body of men can govern it, must govern our preparations both by land and sea. So far as my department (War Office) is concerned, nothing which has been hitherto resolved upon as our force either for defence or for offence can be regarded as settled as apart from the deliberations of this Committee" (21733).

As far as is known, this statement of Mr. Brodrick's governs the procedure of the Defence Committee as reconstituted by the Committee of Three. The point is of the utmost importance. It must also be borne in mind that the functions of Mr. Brodrick's Defence Committee were "deliberative and not executive" (21733).

He said :—

"It is an Advisory Committee, on whose recommendations the Cabinet will take action; and therefore the Committee would not lay down the law; the Committee would advise the Cabinet.

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Q. It decides no point?

A. That is so."

Nothing has hitherto been promulgated which alters the status of the Committee in this respect, and its value as a General Staff must be regarded as subject to this limitation.

Apparently, if a campaign were probable, the plans matured by the *military* General Staff, under the supervision of its Chief, would be presented to the Army Council, in order that the Heads of Departments might express their opinion and explain their requirements under the scheme. It does not follow that the plans would be adopted. I have pointed out that the present Army Council closely resembles the War Office Council as reconstituted in 1900, which also sat under the presidency of the Secretary of State for War. Mr. Brodrick said with regard to it :—

"Of course I reserved the power which the Secretary of State is bound constitutionally to reserve of his giving or not giving an opinion, and of his, if necessary, overruling on the part of the Government the opinion of others" (21595).

In 1899 the opinion of every responsible military adviser had been overruled in deference to political considerations which nearly delivered South Africa to the Boers. There seems scarcely to be a substantial guarantee that the recommendations of the Chief of the General Staff to the Army Council would necessarily fare better than the advice of the Commander-in-Chief, and the representations of the

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Army Board, and the counsels of the Intelligence Department fared then.

If the strategical scheme proposed were accepted, it would come under the consideration of the Defence Committee, who would have the task of co-ordinating it with naval plans and, possibly, of bringing it into accordance with the views of the India and Colonial Offices. At this stage it might be modified, held in abeyance or rejected; and it might conceivably have to meet the competition of plans that had been independently devised by the professional advisers of the Defence Committee, who would probably prefer their own ideas and criticize others in a damaging way even if they did not oppose them.

If the scheme of the Military General Staff were adopted, it would be remitted by the Defence Committee *as an Advisory Committee* to the Cabinet, and, if it had the cordial approval of the Secretary of State for War and the Prime Minister, it would doubtless be accepted by the Government, unless the objections of the Chancellor of the Exchequer were held to be insuperable. But in the course of these three processes there is so much opportunity for division of opinion and for the lapse of responsibility that it seems doubtful whether the safeguard which a military General Staff ought to supply to the nation would really be obtained. To make sure of that advantage, the best possible plan for a given contingency must not only have been thought out beforehand, but it must be put into execution unflinching at the right time. To repeat what

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I have said before, the *military* organization provided by the Committee of Three in their Report seems to be almost above criticism, but there appears to be no adequate security against a dangerous breakdown "at the old place"—the junction-point of the military and political machinery.

Lord Esher's Committee recognized that the Defence Committee "*is necessarily a changing body,*" and showed their appreciation of the seriousness of this disadvantage for a council charged with the duties of a General Staff by adding immediately :—

"*It is not safe to trust matters affecting national security to the chance of a favourable combination of personal characteristics.* We are, therefore, convinced that the addition of a *permanent nucleus* to the Defence Committee is essential as the only valid guarantee (1) that vitally important work with which no one is now charged shall be continuously and consistently carried on, and (2) that the Prime Minister shall have at his disposal all the information needed for the due fulfilment of his weighty responsibilities. And, further, we can conceive no other means of focussing questions of national defence under existing conditions without involving constitutional changes which would be undesirable if not impracticable.

"Before proceeding to discuss the reconstruction of the War Office we are impelled to urge the immediate provision of what is in actual fact *the corner-stone* of the needed edifice of Reform.

"The permanent nucleus of the Defence Committee should consist of :—

I. A Permanent Secretary who should be appointed for five years, renewable at pleasure.

II. Under this official, two naval officers, selected

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by the Admiralty, two military officers, chosen by the War Office, and two Indian officers, nominated by the Viceroy, with, if possible, one or more representatives of the Colonies. *These officers should not be of high rank, and the duration of their appointment should be limited to two years.*

“The duties of the permanent nucleus of the Defence Committee would be :—

A. *To consider all questions of Imperial Defence* from the point of view of the Navy, the Military Forces, India and the Colonies.

B. *To obtain and collate information* from the Admiralty, War Office, India Office, Colonial Office, and other departments of State.

C. *To prepare any documents required by the Prime Minister and the Defence Committee*, anticipating their needs as far as possible.

D. *To furnish such advice as the Committee may ask for in regard to Defence Questions involving more than one Department of State.*

E. To keep adequate records for the use of the Cabinet of the day and of its successors.

“We consider that the functions now vested in the Joint Naval and Military Committee for Defence, and in the Colonial Defence Committee, should be transferred to the Defence Committee. These two Committees should, therefore, be dissolved, as soon as the permanent office which it is proposed to attach to the Defence Committee can be formed” (Report, Part I. pp. 4, 5).

It would be difficult to overrate the power which this “permanent nucleus” will probably obtain. It is “the corner stone of the edifice of reform.” It will be in close and constant touch with the Prime Minister. It will “furnish such advice as the Committee may ask for in regard to Defence Questions

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involving more than one Department of State," whereas the Chief of the Military General Staff, though it will be his duty "to supervise the training and preparation of the Army for war, and to study military schemes, offensive and defensive" (Part II. p. 23), and though he will have in charge "*Military Policy in all its branches*, War Staff duties, *Intelligence*, Mobilization, Plans of Operations, Training, *Military History*, Higher Education and War Regulations" (Part I. p. 9), will, like the Army Council, of which he is a member, exercise authority in relation to only one arm of the Service. For all co-ordinated operations, he will become practically subordinate to the two military officers, who "should not be of high rank," and who will be attached to the permanent nucleus of the Defence Committee; for, as we have seen, it is their duty "to furnish such advice as the Committee may ask for in regard to Defence Questions involving *more than one* Department of State." They will obtain—presumably, on demand—and collate information from the War Office.

Moreover, the permanent nucleus of the Defence Committee will be the only element of that "necessarily changing body" which can preserve, to a considerable extent, continuity of information and represent an unbroken tradition. Its authority will certainly be augmented by the fact that new Prime Ministers and other incoming members of the Committee must look to it for knowledge of past situations and past policy.

It is not a matter of certainty that the Chief of

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the Military General Staff will be a member of the Defence Committee, or that the military officers attached to the permanent nucleus of that council will be drawn from the General Staff. But if we assume that, in practice, both these things will be customary, an extremely awkward relation might be established between the officers and their military chief. They are his subordinates, yet they have power to demand information from him, have the duty of constructing co-ordinated schemes which might, as I have said, overrule his military plans, and can in conjunction with their colleagues offer to the Prime Minister's Committee advice on questions of Imperial Defence "from the point of view of the Military Forces" as well as the other forces of the Crown. In fact, these junior officers, who hold their appointment for two years, will exercise a more important and far-reaching authority than that of the head of the Thinking Department which is to deal with "military policy in all its branches."

Again, is it not clear that, under the proposed system, "military schemes offensive and defensive" will be studied independently in two places—by the military General Staff as a most important part of its normal duties, and by the officers of the permanent nucleus of the Defence Committee from the point of view of co-ordinated action? Is there any guarantee that the plans proposed would not clash? And what would be the safeguard of a Cabinet, having to choose between conflicting opinions, against the disastrous hesitation and uncertainty that prevailed in 1899?

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It is obvious that the greatest advantages would be obtained by means of the Defence Committee as now constituted, aided by a competent secretariat, *if this machinery worked as the Committee of Three intend it to work.* But when we consider the history of the relation of political chiefs to military problems we must ask whether that result will really follow.

The position of the British Chief of the General Staff has another serious disadvantage. Col. C. W. B. Bell prepared a report upon the German system of army organization, which was laid before the Hartington Commission. In dealing with the General Staff he pointed out that von Moltke had held the position of Chief of it since 1857, and the Committee of Three remarked, with reference to his long-continued work of perfecting and supervising that department, "The results were strikingly apparent in 1866 and in 1870-71" (Report, Part II. p. 21).

Such continuity of purpose and control is invaluable, and with reference to the Defence Committee, the Three Reformers said, "We would venture to suggest the vital importance of giving to that institution, yet in its infancy, as powerful a sanction for continuity and permanence as may be consistent with the retention by the Prime Minister of perfect freedom of action in regard to its component parts" (Report, Part I. p. 1). But the British Chief of the General Staff is the "First Military Member" of the Army Council, and he would therefore be subject to the following rule recommended by the Committee of Three:—

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"We urge that four years should be the maximum period during which an officer can hold the position of a Military Member of the Army Council. He should then return to active employment on the Staff, or in command, *for at least one year* before he is re-employed in the Office" (Report, Part II. p. 5).

It seems obvious that the General Staff could not be left without a Chief for one twelvemonth in every five, and the consequence appears to be that the department would frequently be "under new management."

It need hardly be said that the objects which the Committee had in view in proposing this system of tenure of office were admirable. "The Military members of the Army Council should realize that the changes which they propose, and the rules which they devise, will affect themselves as well as others, and that they will profit or suffer according as their administration is prudent or unwise" (*ib.*). But it seems disputable, in the case of the "First Military Member," whether the benefits of this regulation are not outweighed by the disadvantages of a breach of continuity in administration. The Chief of the General Staff should be, and probably will be as a rule, the ablest soldier in our service; and I venture to suggest that provision should be made for extending his term of office when it appears desirable to do so. With regard to the Adjutant-General's department, the same frequent changes of control seem scarcely likely to be altogether beneficial to the Army Medical Service and the Auxiliary Forces, which have already suffered

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severely from shifting plans and purposes.¹ There seem to be forcible arguments for giving direct

¹ The following extracts are taken from *The Daily Chronicle* of April 23, 1904 :—

“ A correspondence between Sir Howard Vincent, M.P., and General Sir Alfred Turner, K.C.B., the late Inspector-General of Auxiliary Forces, throws light on the dissatisfaction created in Volunteer circles by the recent War Office changes, following the report of Lord Esher's Committee.

“ Asking General Turner for information with regard to his resignation, and that of his chief assistant, Colonel Leroy Lewis, Sir Howard Vincent expresses regret at the fact, and assures Sir Alfred of the goodwill of all Volunteers towards him. He comments on Mr. Arnold-Forster's promise to encourage the development of the Volunteer force, and check the downward course apparent since the untimely issue of the new regulations of November, 1901, as a ‘ welcome ’ to the 30,000 Volunteers fresh from active service. He proceeds :—

“ ‘ It is reported that your successor, General Mackinnon, is to be sent to Whitehall, with an adviser for the Militia, the Yeomanry, and the Volunteers, but “ with their duties limited to examining inspection reports, confirming the appointments, promotion and appointments of general officers commanding districts, and keeping the roster for duty of the dozen or so A.D.C.s to the King.”

“ ‘ These duties seem to be far from likely to satisfy the energies and abilities of General Mackinnon and his three assistants, and to be very different from the supervision, training, and preparation for war of the 400,000 men of the auxiliary forces of which such a branch should have charge, and which was promised in the House of Commons by Mr. Wyndham, when Under-Secretary of State, on behalf of Lord Lansdowne.’ ”

(On March 18, 1900, Mr. Wyndham said :—

“ There will be a separate branch of the War Office to deal with our Auxiliary Forces, men who are *personæ gratae* with them, and who are especially qualified to understand their interests.”)

“ ‘ The Adjutant-General under the old system concentrated everything into his own hands. Under the new

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representation on the Secretary of State for War's Council to both these branches and good reasons system I observe that he is to do so even to a greater extent still, with eleven departments.

“ ‘ I do not know what will be the recommendations of the Duke of Norfolk's Commission, which has been laboriously studying the question for a year and a half. But I shall be greatly surprised if it is thus to accentuate all that was worst in the old system and to leave the Auxiliary Forces, and particularly the Volunteers, to the fitful attention of departments too often out of sympathy with them.

“ ‘ At present things are no better, if not indeed worse, than they were in the summer and autumn of 1899, when in vain I urged the War Office to prepare for the active employment of the Volunteer Force, rendered necessary a few months later. There are fewer officers, fewer men, and less organization ; and, worse still, the good feeling then existing has been largely destroyed, and not a little by the ill-advised proceedings of two officers in Department “ A.G.8,” who, I regret to hear, are still retained on the Headquarter Staff despite the regulations limiting such employment to three, or at most five, years.’

“ Writing from Carlyle House, Chelsea Embankment, on April 18, Sir Alfred Turner informs Sir Howard Vincent that in the ordinary course his retirement would have taken place on March 3, but a few days earlier he was asked by Mr. Arnold-Forster to continue to serve till the report of the Duke of Norfolk's Royal Commission on the Militia and Volunteers was published, and in spite of inconvenience he consented to stay on as long as the Government required his services.

“ ‘ At the end of last month,’ he proceeds, ‘ Part III. of the report of Lord Esher's Committee was published, whereupon I was again sent for by Mr. Arnold-Forster, and told that my successor had been appointed. I was asked when it would suit my convenience to go. As I had expected to remain till the report of the Duke of Norfolk's Royal Commission was published, I had made sundry official engagements up to April 21. I therefore suggested that day, which was agreed on.

“ ‘ A day or two later I heard that Part III. of the Esher Report had been adopted and put into operation without

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for securing to them a continuous controlling policy.

waiting for the result of the Duke of Norfolk's Commission, which was still sitting. I further received a letter directing me to send all my communications to the Adjutant-General as of yore, instead of direct to the Army Council, as I had been ordered to do the month previous, *thus recurring to the old state of things, which has produced, more than anything else with regard to the auxiliary forces, the terrible delay for which the War Office is so notorious, and to which I have always taken very strong exception.*

“ ‘ I also found that the greater part of its work was to be taken from the Department and its importance reduced to a minimum. I therefore wrote to the Adjutant-General, and requested that I might be relieved at as early a date as possible after my return from Leeds to-day, the reply being that I should be placed on retired pay on the 19th inst.

“ ‘ My request cannot be termed a resignation in the ordinary sense of the word, but one to be relieved of my office at an earlier date than that settled ; and this I begged as the only protest in my power to offer against a course which, I am convinced from experience, is one very prejudicial to the well-being and efficiency of the auxiliary forces.’ ”

Since the foregoing extracts were published the Duke of Norfolk's Commission has reported. The majority of the members recommended that “ the Volunteer Force should be managed at the War Office by a separate department, the head of which should have special knowledge of, and experience with, Volunteers, and should report direct to the Army Council ” (Report, p. 11). But on June 9, 1904, Mr. Balfour told a deputation that “ the Government desired to treat the Militia, Yeomanry, and Volunteers as an effective part of the Home Army. Therefore, it seemed necessary that their representation should be assigned to *one of the great Departments of the War Office.* But it had been arranged by the Secretary of State that, with regard to all cases where any matter of policy or organization affecting the interests of the auxiliary forces came before the Director (General Mackinnon) he should have *direct access* to the Secretary of State, and that all papers which he

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The direct predecessor of the present Army Council was the War Office Council. "The Army Council," wrote the Committee of Three, "is to administer and not to command the Army" (Report, Part I. p. 14), and the history of the Council to which it succeeds shows that the idea of administering the Army by a board resembling that of the Admiralty had been making progress for some time. The War Office Council dated from 1890, the year in which the Hartington Commission reported, and it is likely that its establishment was to some extent due to the recommendations then made. Sir Ralph Knox gave the following account of its origin :—

"Of course there had always been meetings in the Secretary of State's room : that is the way much of the business was carried on when it came before the Secretary

desired to go to the Secretary of State should reach that Minister's hands *after they had passed the Adjutant-General.*"
—(*Daily Chronicle.*)

This scheme reproduces the worst fault of the Order in Council by which War Office procedure was regulated in 1895, and for which Lord Lansdowne was responsible. Under it heads of departments, while subordinate to the Commander-in-Chief, "had access" to the Secretary of State and could offer him advice, which might be opposed to that of their superior officer. For obvious reasons, the plan was unsatisfactory. And if the Director of Auxiliary Forces is empowered to combat the wishes and challenge the decisions of his superior officer, the Adjutant-General, before the Secretary of State, while retaining his subordinate position, the same unfortunate relations will be established between the administrators of the Auxiliary Forces as formerly existed between the administrators of the whole army. If the Director's power does *not* permit him to press independent opinions, his privilege is valueless.

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of State ; but I see it was in 1890 that the War Office Council was first recognized" (1154).

It was established on May 12 of that year, and had the following constitution :—

President :

The Secretary of State.

Members :

The Under Secretaries of State.

The Financial Secretary.

The Commander-in-Chief.

The Adjutant-General.

The Quartermaster-General.

The Inspector-General of Fortifications.

The Director-General of Ordnance.

And any other official who might be summoned by the Secretary of State.

While thus organized, it "met at irregular intervals to consider such questions as might be referred to it by the Secretary of State. Its functions were not defined" (Appendix Vol. p. 294). At this time "no individual member" (other than the Secretary of State) "had any initiative"; but if such a member "desired to bring a matter before the War Office Council he certainly would not have been denied the opportunity of doing so."—(Lord Lansdowne, 21478.)

Mr. Brodrick reconstituted the Council. He said :—

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“The change which I made when I came to the War Office in 1900, or which I carried out afterwards and set on foot, was to establish the War Office Council on a permanent basis. Up to that time it had met intermittently. It had taken up only such questions as the Secretary of State from time to time submitted to it; it had practically very little in the way of records; there was a record only of decisions, and no record of the opinions expressed. I thought it necessary to have a Council with much more extended powers, in which each member should be able to bring up any subject that he desired, and that the opinions of individual officers should be registered and notes taken of them for future reference” (21595).

The membership under Mr. Brodrick's regulation was as follows :—

President :

The Secretary of State for War.

Members :

The Commander-in-Chief.

The Parliamentary Under Secretary of State.

The Permanent Under Secretary of State.

The Financial Secretary.

The Quartermaster-General.

The Inspector-General of Fortifications.

The Director-General of Ordnance.

The Adjutant-General.

The Director-General of Mobilization and
Military Intelligence.

The Director-General, Army Medical Department (for medical and sanitary questions).

The Secretary of the Council.

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“And such other members of the Staff of the War Office as may be specially summoned from time to time.”—Appendix Vol. p. 294.

And it was provided that :—

“The Council will discuss such matters as may be referred to it by the Secretary of State, and any question brought before it by individual members. In order that a précis may be prepared, notice of the matters for discussion, together with the office papers on the subject, should reach the Secretary not later than the Wednesday evening before each meeting.”—Appendix Vol. p. 294.

Colonel Ward was asked to give an example of the sort of questions raised before the War Office Council, and said they were “important general subjects, like the organization of a cavalry regiment, or whether a battery of the First Army Corps is to be six or four guns” (1531). In this respect the functions, as well as the composition, of the new Council will resemble those of the old.

The Committee of Three wrote, with regard to the War Office Council, that it “appears to have been purely a consultative body” and that “the confusion of administrative ideas which prevailed is well illustrated by the fact that the Commander-in-Chief as well as his principal direct subordinates were members of the Council” (Report, Part III. p. 17). It is clear that the soldiers concerned were not to blame for these defects of constitution ; they could only take up the positions appointed to them. But a misapprehension which prevailed later among

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the Service members of the assembly shows very plainly how the mental attitude of the soldier—a traditional attitude from which departure is, for many reasons, rare—may bring about very serious misunderstandings even in simple matters between military advisers and political chiefs. This misapprehension is referred to in another chapter.

Under the old *régime* there was, besides the administrative Council, an Army Board which dealt with the immediate preparations for war. This body—the complexity of whose origin puzzled even the Royal Commissioners—was the result of an amalgamation. Lord Lansdowne explained the formation of the first Army Board in the following passage :—

“ When I took office (in 1895), I found that there were in existence—first, a War Office meeting, which used to be convened by the Secretary of State, and at which the heads of departments, military and civilian, were present ; it met rarely, and, in fact, I do not think it is too much to say that at that time those meetings had almost fallen into desuetude. Besides that, there were what were known as Adjutant-General’s meetings ; they were meetings attended by the Adjutant-General and the three other great military heads. These meetings were not recognized by the constitution of the War Office, and I think they may be regarded as having, to some extent, grown up in consequence of the somewhat special condition of the War Office at that time when the Duke of Cambridge was Commander-in-Chief. The Duke of Cambridge gave a great deal of attention to certain parts of the business, and not so much to others, and the Adjutant-General consequently

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acquired a position of special authority in the office.¹ It was his habit to convene his military colleagues, and to confer with them as to various questions as they arose. I thought the arrangement a bad one, partly because it had no place in the constitution of the office. I therefore regularized the matter by creating the Army Board, which consisted of the Commander-in-Chief and the four other military heads " (21471).

The four other military heads were, of course, the Adjutant-General, the Quartermaster-General, the Inspector-General of Fortifications, and the Director-General of Ordnance (21488).

" So long ago as 1877 there was established what was called a Confidential Mobilization Committee ; and for the various campaigns that have taken place since then this Committee has been summoned, in order that the Military Departments, in communication with the Financial Department, should consult together as to what steps were necessary to meet deficiencies, large or small, that existed for carrying out the operations, and to make them good and so forth ; and on every occasion of active operations that Committee has been assembled to deal with them " (Knox, 1164).

According to modern ideas, it seems hazardous to wait till hostilities are at least probable before meeting " deficiencies large or small," and the Committee was a cumbrous body. Lord Lans-

¹ The following observation of the Committee of Three is worthy of note :—" A long peace, by inducing oblivion of the requirements of war, inevitably tends to exalt the functions of the Adjutant-General " (Report, Part II. p. 21). Many critics are of opinion that their scheme tends rather to increase than diminish the danger of this undue preponderance of one department.

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downe said, speaking of the preparations made early in 1899 :—

“ The Committee consisted of nineteen members, and it became apparent at the very outset that the body was not a well-composed body for the purpose of dealing expeditiously with the kind of points which arose from day to day. I therefore substituted for it a Board comprising the Old Army Board, . . . with the addition of the Accountant-General and the Assistant-Under-Secretary of State. I made these additions because I thought it extremely desirable that the soldiers should have, so to speak, in their pocket two members of the permanent civilian staff of the War Office, who would be able to tell them, the one about the back history of any question that might come up, and the other about its financial aspects ” (21488).

General Buller gave a vivacious account of the *histoire intime* of the formation of the “ new ” Army Board. He said :—

“ What really happened was this : I came up from Aldershot early in July (1899), and I told the Under-Secretary of State for War that, if the War Office telegrams were published hereafter, he would be hanged. I said, ‘ Every head of every department of the War Office is sending out telegrams on the same subject, but in a different sense, to that poor unfortunate General at the Cape, and you will drive him mad.’ He asked me, ‘ What would you do to remedy it ? ’ and I said, ‘ The remedy is to assemble the old Adjutant-General’s meeting, which is now called the Commander-in-Chief’s meeting, and which was originally dispersed by Lord Lansdowne’s order.’ He agreed with me, and it was done, and the Commander-in-Chief’s meeting, which really was the meeting of the military chiefs, was re-created, and began to do very good work ; and all these

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different military departments were thrown into line through meeting at the Commander-in-Chief's meeting. I think the one mistake they made—they did not want it to be known at the time that they were meeting, because it was rather contrary to the Regulations of the War Office—is that I should have attended as Commander-in-Chief designate, but that is a detail. After the Permanent Under-Secretary of the War Office returned from leave he found out that this was going on, and he then added to that Commander-in-Chief's meeting either himself or his Deputy and the Accountant-General, and that was afterwards called the Army Board " (15645).

I desire to call attention to the history of the Army Board for the following reason—it contained in 1899 *all* the military chiefs to whom a Government would naturally turn for advice on the eve of a campaign. The Commander-in-Chief had at that time the duty of preparing strategical schemes, and the Intelligence Department was directly subordinate to him. If we allow for the change made by the abolition of the Commander-in-Chief's office and the appointment of a Chief of the General Staff, we arrive at the very remarkable fact that the Army Board in 1899 had a composition closely resembling that of the present Army Council—indeed, if the old nomenclature had been retained, the difference would scarcely extend beyond the substitution of the Chief of the General Staff for the Commander-in-Chief. Now, "the minutes of the Army Board during the period up to September 22, 1899, make it clear that in the opinion of that Board the main difficulty was the refusal of sanction for the expen-

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diture of the money involved, amounting to about £640,000" (*Report of the Royal Commission*, p. 26). The demands of the Army Board were disregarded until the fulfilment of them came too late, and this course was taken by reason of political considerations. Everybody knows how nearly it led to disaster. Is there any guarantee that if the Army Council put forward unwelcome claims on a similar occasion they would receive from the Cabinet of the moment different treatment from that which was given to the representations of the Army Board in 1899?

This Board has now been abolished. The Committee of Three wrote :—

"The machinery which we have proposed will render the Army Board unnecessary. When, however, operations in the field are imminent, it is essential to focus the requirements of the expeditionary force, and by superseding all discussion on paper, to enable instant executive action to be taken for the provision of any special equipment or stores required. This important object will be secured by daily meetings of Directors" (i.e. heads of departments under the several members of the Army Council), "leaving the Army Council free for the consideration of larger questions" (*Report*, Part II. p. 7).

It will be remembered that the Military General Staff and the Defence Committee would be considering the larger questions at the same time, and it is difficult to see how that unity of purpose and plan could be attained by which alone the political chiefs might be induced to give due regard to military needs.

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It is unnecessary to mention any of the other assemblies which met at the War Office under the old system. Their name was legion, and it not infrequently happened that an eminent soldier spent his days in passing from one Committee to another. The Three Reformers wrote :—

“ We have been struck by the very large number of committees which the War Office employs. At one period there appear to have been twenty-four temporary committees exclusive of those of a permanent character.

“ It seems to have become a habit to assemble a committee whenever any question arises requiring special consideration. The work of these committees occasionally overlaps. Their Reports accumulate and are not adequately studied. The general result is to delay necessary action, to destroy responsibility, and to entail a large aggregate expenditure.

“ We believe that the adoption of our proposals will help to check an evil which arises mainly from administrative weakness ” (Report, Part III. p. 20).

No one who knows the history of the War Office as it was will dissent from these candid remarks.

CHAPTER VI

THE OLD FAULTS

A GREAT public controversy often ends in the general adoption of a misleading phrase, which is supposed to cover facts that no single phrase can cover. At the present time, if you ask the man in the street what brought upon us the catastrophes of 1899 and 1900 in South Africa, he will probably answer, "The muddle at the War Office." As a fact, the muddle at the War Office was quite as much a symptom due to our national political customs as a source of our misfortunes. And if we are to discover how far recent reforms have removed the *causes* of our inefficiency we must study not only those which originated in War Office administration but those which lay outside its scope.

It is impossible to consider the question thoroughly unless one bears in mind two factors which have a constant and most important influence but cannot be crystallized in evidence before a Royal Commission. The first is habit, as it has been developed alike in the nation and its military administrators, and the second is that

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optimism which is natural—almost inevitable—in the politician who wishes to make a good impression in Parliament and who does *not* wish to give umbrage to the rank and file of his party or “points” to the Opposition.

In Army matters we are a nation of chronic muddlers. Mr. Wyndham once quoted in the House of Commons an interesting instance of our methods in “the good old times.” He said: “In these days, when we are criticized, and properly criticized, for not having a sufficiency of stores, may I remind hon. members that Bermuda was once defended against two Spanish ships with three cannon balls. Two of them were fired and the Spanish ships retired, the station being left with a reserve of one cannon ball.” He added: “That is the way we muddled through in the old days” (March 13, 1900, *Times* report). Mr. Brodrick not long ago reminded the House that

“In the Peninsular War we had 240,000 men on the lists, and never at any single time—*such was our organization*—were we able to give the Duke of Wellington the support of more than 60,000 or 70,000 men. At Waterloo, in a year in which Parliament voted 214,000 men, the utmost that went to Flanders was 44,000 men. In the Crimea you have the same story. In that war 216,000 men were voted by Parliament in the second year, and at no time until the last day of the war were there more than 52,000 men in the field.”—(*Times* report, March 5, 1902.)

He had referred to the Crimean blunders on a previous occasion, when he said:—

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“We are not meeting with such a collapse as occurred after the Crimean war. We are not repairing the complete breakdown of our system. We are not here tonight to lament, as we had to do after the Crimean war, that, after sending out 30,000 or 40,000 men we could only fill up the gaps in the ranks with a few raw boys sent out straight from the depôts.”

So far he was within the mark, but his succeeding sentence carries us straight to the point of official optimism. “We are not here,” he added, “to apologize for great failures in the provision of stores and munitions of war.”—(May 17, 1901, *Times* report.)

Instances of this professional confidence could be multiplied to a very remarkable extent.

Sometimes optimism is exchanged for what one is tempted to call an ingenuous disingenuousness. Lord Lansdowne, on January 31, 1900, said in the House of Lords :—

“The leader of the Opposition quoted from a speech of Mr. Balfour’s a passage in which Mr. Balfour seemed to admit that we were open to the reproach of unpreparedness for war. But I think the statement of Mr. Balfour was that we were unprepared for war on the spot, and that is, after all, a very different thing.”—(*Times* report.)

This statement appears to imply (1) that we *were* prepared for war at home; (2) that it was excusable to be unprepared for war “on the spot,” though the defence of the Colonies was part of the Government policy; (3) that after months and even

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years of warning it is sufficient to be ready 6,000 miles from the scene of operations. This is a "hard saying," and it illustrates a permanent factor in the situation—the view taken of military requirements by the political men who control the equipment and distribution of the army. The arrangements necessary in almost every contingency should, of course, be thought out beforehand. The need for this precaution seems especially obvious in a case where hostilities, as in South Africa, have long been probable and have become imminent.

One other preliminary point deserves consideration. There is a natural tendency in very many people to seek the cause of our deficiencies in the abnormal backsliding of some politician or the unusually reprobate state of some Cabinet. But on reflection no one—not even a leader-writer for the *Daily News*—believes that one body of Ministers will form a marvellous congregation of all the most hardened, abandoned sinners in political life. The competency and diligence of individuals naturally vary much ; but the average ability and integrity of a group of statesmen shows no extreme fluctuation. There was "something rotten" in our system of co-ordinating military and political exigencies before the war ; but the fault lay more with our traditional methods than with persons.

To arraign one Government would be to arraign others which had permitted the same faults to remain, but had had the good fortune not to be found out. Both parties had done that which they

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ought not to have done and left undone that which they ought to have done ; but the Liberal Party more than the Conservative. The truth is, that until the Report of the late War Commission was published, there was not steam enough up in the country to drag our ruinous system to the refuse destructor.

Now, was the muddle *at the War Office* so complete as is supposed ? Was there in reality no ground-plan of preparation for hostilities ? It is customary to speak of "the blunders of the war" *en bloc*. But, setting aside those which were purely military and in no way due to the Home Administration, another distinction must be clearly kept in view if we seek to determine the extent to which our organization failed ; that is, the distinction between National Policy and Ministerial Policy. The National Policy defined the constitution and fixed the strength of the military force which was to be maintained by the Ministry in power. This policy, therefore, limited alike the responsibility of the Government and the resources which it could supply to the Army. It was not adopted by the Ministry which was in office at the commencement of the campaign against the Boers, but was settled in 1888 by Mr. Stanhope, who was then Secretary of State for War, on behalf of the Government (Report Vol. p. 249).

Mr. Stanhope's paper was thus summarized by Lord Lansdowne in 1897 :—

"The objects of our military organization, as laid down

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by Mr. Stanhope on behalf of the Government in 1888, are in substance as follows :—

- (a) The effective support of the civil power.
- (b) To find the number of men for India fixed by agreement with the Government of India.
- (c) To find garrisons for all our fortresses and coaling stations at home and abroad.
- (d) To be able to mobilize rapidly for home defence three Army Corps, and four Cavalry brigades, and to organize the auxiliary forces, not allotted to Army Corps or garrisons, for the defence of London and of mercantile ports.
- (e) *To be able to send abroad for war two Army Corps, with Cavalry division and line of communication.*

I have always assumed that this scheme held the field. . . . The following should, however, be added to make the statement complete.

- (f) To be able to provide at short notice a small force for an expedition, demonstration, or temporary reinforcement, without dislocating the peace organization and duties of the Home Army.
- (g) To provide for the permanent maintenance of the force now occupying Egypt, and for the retention for some years to come of the extra force now employed in South Africa.”—(Report Vol. p. 249.)

That was the National Policy. The Ministerial Policy, which the Government, of course, did not inherit but chose, has already been given in outline. It was that the Colonies in South Africa should be effectively garrisoned to secure them from invasion: pending the arrival of the field force from home—that is to say, during three or four

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months after the outbreak of war. It is extremely worthy of remark that in spite of well-defined requirements and a much reformed method of bringing military advice before the Government, every kind of shortcoming was possible.

It must be borne in mind, however, that the War Office cannot justly be blamed for failures due to the fact that it was, during the war, called upon to provide and maintain a far greater force than the National Policy permitted it to have "in being." And it is fair to add that when the nation and the Government became alive to the realities of the situation and when money was given and hindrances were removed, the War Office performed a task far greater than that for which it had been expected to prepare—one for which it had no adequate means at its disposal, and which overtaxed its organization at every point. A breakdown under such a strain would have been excusable. But the work was done better than in time of peace, and the efforts sufficed to bring the war to a successful issue. Few people are likely to grudge praise for that splendid endeavour to redeem faults at the beginning. And it is grossly unjust to criticize an administration for not effecting what National Policy had clearly prohibited it from attempting to do.

To give one instance. It is unquestionable that there was mismanagement in the Remount Department, which was evidently to blame for not consulting the Intelligence Department before the war. The Inspector-General of Remounts said

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“that he had a very considerable amount of information as to horses generally, in different countries, but he could not show it in black and white,” whereas his department “could perfectly easily have acquired information during peace time as to the capabilities of foreign countries to furnish horses by asking the Intelligence Department to get it for them” (12979-80). It was a measure of prevision which they ought to have taken. But, when the demand for horses exceeded anything which our standard of military preparations provided for, the department was placed in circumstances which defeat an indictment.

We must now consider what the machinery was which led to failure, if we wish to understand how the causes of danger can be eliminated from it.

From the point of view of soldiers, the Cabinet controls the Army as a working instrument; for they can, of course, neither adopt a military policy nor incur expenditure without its leave. The Cabinet, therefore, has the Army at its disposal, and the soldiers can only (1) advise the politicians, (2) act as the military executive of the Government.

Sir Evelyn Wood, who was Adjutant-General from 1897 to 1901, explained the situation concisely to the Royal Commission. He said:—

“The command of the Army is from the Cabinet, we understand. . . . The question has never arisen since Mr. Cardwell’s days” (4095; 4097).

The Government, then, has full power to determine the extent, general character, objective, and

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date of any military preparations and operations, and is answerable to Parliament for their sufficiency and success. But as the Cabinet is usually composed almost entirely of civilians; and as any soldier who may happen to be a member of it is so in his political and not in his military capacity, it follows that the Government is dependent for expert advice on its military advisers. Now, it would quite naturally be supposed that these advisers would—

(1) Act in concert and as a homogeneous body in offering their counsels, and not independently and without one another's cognizance;

(2) Would collectively have such an authority with regard to purely military matters and dispositions that their advice would have, in this respect, practically a binding power on the Government. For what Government would expose itself to the risk of answering to Parliament for disasters brought about by deliberate disregard of the counsels of its expert advisers, if they spoke as a united body? Or, (to return to our supposition), if the military counselling body did not act collectively, one would imagine that there would be one among them whose *prestige* would be held to make him supreme, and whose plans would be adopted and carried out consistently; for it is needless to argue the point that a military plan cut about by civilians and patched with parts of other advisers' plans is likely to have a ruinous effect.

But, as a matter of fact, there was no advisory

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body which gave expert advice collectively and with the force of collective opinion. There were independent advisers, with an extremely awkward relation to one another. They were the Commander-in-Chief, who had "a very well defined position as the principal adviser of the Secretary of State" (Lord Lansdowne, 12076); the Adjutant-General, the Quartermaster-General, the Inspector-General of Fortifications, and the Director-General of Ordnance. The four latter high officers were "under the supervision" but "not under the control" of the Commander-in-Chief—which means that they had "separate access to the Secretary of State" (18230-1). Lord Lansdowne also consulted Sir Redvers Buller (21076). The misunderstandings which thereupon arose have already been described.

The arrangements described above with regard to "supervision," "control" and "separate access" were established by the Order in Council of 1895, for which Lord Lansdowne was responsible (21425). They were not altogether innovations. "Constantly under the old organization these high officers"—those named above as being only under the "supervision" of the Commander-in-Chief—"were in communication with the Secretary of State," and "this Order in Council recognized not only the communication, but also an absolutely independent responsibility as between them and the Secretary of State" (Sir Ralph Knox, 1136). It is not surprising that under this system of divided authority and diffused responsibility

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real power was not in the hands of any soldier. The Commander-in-Chief was at least under the impression that his advice as to the protection of the Colonies was neglected; and it is beyond question that, in the vital matter of date, his recommendations were ignored. His forecast may have been wise or unwise, his strategy may have been correct or faulty, but the fact remains that neither his plan nor any one else's was adopted and carried out fully and in proper sequence—and no military scheme has a chance of success apart from these conditions.

To put the matter briefly, under our system of administration as it was, there was no authoritative military voice, when war was within measurable distance, to demand adequate preparations in due time and to determine initial strategy.

In this connection we must refer to the abolition of the office of Commander-in-Chief and the consequences of that change. The establishment of the post of Inspector-General of the Forces is an invaluable measure of military reform, and its purpose must be briefly described before we proceed with the criticism of faults which prevailed under our former methods. The Committee of Three wrote thus with regard to the Inspector's functions :—

“An Inspector-General of the Forces should be appointed for a period of five years, who should command and direct the various inspectors.

“It may be objected that the appointment of this

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high officer might derogate from the influence and authority of the executive commanders. We cannot accept this view for the following reasons :—

(a) An Inspector-General of the Forces already exists in the person of the Commander-in-Chief, who has been prevented by the nature of his office from discharging his duties.

(b) Inspectors - General of Cavalry, of Garrison Artillery, and of Engineers already exist, and have not been found to clash with Army Corps Commanders.

“The main object sought is to provide the Secretary of State and council with eyes and ears other than those of the administrative heads of the War Office, who cannot have time or opportunity for inspection.

“The duties of the Inspector-General should, therefore, be those of review and of report on the practical results of the policy of the Army Council within the financial limits laid down by the Cabinet. His field of action would cover the United Kingdom and those portions of the Empire where troops under the control of the Home Government are stationed. He must form a judgment, either personally or through his staff as the Army Council may direct, on the efficiency of officers and men, on the handling of troops, on the standard and system of training, on the suitability of equipment, and generally on all that affects the readiness of the forces for war.

“As pointed out in Section II of our Report (Section 19), the sole function of an Inspector-General would be to report on actual facts, without expressing opinions on policy.

“Directly under the Inspector-General as part of his staff should be inspectors of :—

Cavalry.

Horse and Field Artillery.

Garrison Artillery.

Engineers.

Mounted Infantry.

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“We do not propose the appointment of subordinate inspectors of Infantry, who have not been found necessary in Germany.

“The Inspector-General should attend or be represented at all manœuvres or considerable reviews of troops. He should act as Chief Umpire at large manœuvres, thus avoiding the need of depriving an executive officer of an opportunity for practice in the duties of high command.

“He should prepare a careful annual report to the Secretary of State and Council by November 1, in order that, when the Estimates for the coming financial year are under discussion, the Army Council may have the advantage of considering the facts disclosed by his independent inspection.

“The annual report should be divided into heads corresponding to the distribution of duties among the members of the Army Council.

“The Inspector-General should enter his opinions on the confidential reports of all commanding officers, and may report on any officer.”

Under this system an admirable safeguard for the interests of the country is provided. Formerly the heads of the departments of military administration were expected to disclose to the Secretary of State deficiencies which occurred under their rule. The method was unsatisfactory, and there can be little doubt that it rendered possible a disastrous waste of money. Whatever else we purchased, we did not purchase efficiency. Now, the report of the Inspector-General, in conjunction with the right of Members of Parliament to ask questions regarding it, should ensure that outlay is directed to the right quarters and that the military force which, as a matter of national policy, it is determined to

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maintain, will be found at all times properly equipped and ready for service. But, obviously, the powers of this high officer do not give him authority "to demand adequate preparation in due time" or in any way to determine initial strategy. He is, so to speak, the Commander-in-Chief's successor but not his heir, and even the Commander-in-Chief was without real power to perform these two most important duties.

The obvious flaw in the War Office machinery prior to the recent reforms was divided responsibility. The question which the country should consider most closely is whether the scheme now adopted has finally removed that defect. This scheme "has been conceived and elaborated as a whole," and if it is adopted *en bloc* and acquires the prestige of an established institution in our national life, the excellence of its military arrangements may, in time of peace, conceal the faultiness of its political working, which might have a decisive and disastrous effect upon preparations for war.

Nothing dies so hard as a professional tradition, and nowhere have professional traditions such vitality as in the army. For this reason it is well to realize clearly how many of our difficulties arose not from the incapacity but from the attitude of mind of the men responsible for them.

Another cause of friction in our machinery as it was must be alluded to briefly, because no administrative changes can, of themselves, remove it. The Committee of Three have told us that time will be needed to create new habits of thought

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in the Army. I venture to add that not only time will be required but a firm determination in all ranks.

A misapprehension which was mentioned at some length before the Royal Commission on the War typifies the misunderstandings which arise from the old-standing difference between the soldier's and the politician's point of view. A glance at the paragraph regulating the procedure of the War Office Council shows that "any question brought before it by individual members" might be discussed; but that notice should reach the Secretary by a certain date. This seems plain enough. Nevertheless, the rule gave rise to very serious confusion.

Mr. Brodrick said :—

"Each individual member of the War Office Council has full power to bring any subject before it. . . . As a matter of courtesy, most of them who have asked to have a thing discussed have done so through me, but they would be perfectly in order in putting a matter down for discussion by simply sending it to the Permanent Under Secretary. I think, as a matter of courtesy, it is desirable to put to the Secretary of State, 'I should like this discussed at the War Office Council'" (21611).

The following passage is taken from General Kelly-Kenny's evidence :—

"Q. In the War Office Council you could bring up a matter of your own motion ?

A. No.

Q. What is the restriction ?

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A. There is an agenda paper sent round, and the discussions in the War Office are confined to the matters on the agenda, and questions arising out of them, but no one ever raises a point that we are not prepared to discuss.

Q. But would you not have the right to ask that a subject which you wished to put forward should be put on the agenda?

A. No; the Secretary of State decides what should be brought before the War Office Council, what he should refuse, and what he can consent to; and even at the War Office Council his decision is final, irrespective of the votes or the opinions of the members of the War Office Council.

Q. I quite understand that the Secretary of State has an overriding authority; but we were informed that the difference between the War Office Council before and after the last Order in Council was that now the members were entitled to have put on the agenda any subject which they deemed of importance, and that it was freely discussed at the War Office Council?

A. If the power exists, I do not know that it is ever exercised.

Q. I only mention to you what we were told?

A. I do not know of it.

Q. That has not come within your experience?

A. The procedure is that we put forward proposals either to the Secretary of State or to the Commander-in-Chief, and then it is decided by the Secretary of State whether they should be discussed or not—whether he wants advice from the Council, or whether he refuses it, or whether he assents to it. That is the position.

Q. That, as I understand, was the position before the Order in Council of 1901?

A. No; that is the position now" (4491, *seq.*).

Those who believe that political chiefs will, from diffidence, be amenable to military advice

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on military subjects should carefully consider this passage, remembering that the constitution of the War Office Council closely resembled that of the present Army Council. Mr. Brodrick said: "I think General Kelly-Kenny has a little misapprehended it" (the regulation governing procedure at the Council). But the view of the matter generally taken by the soldiers was unmistakably described by Lord Roberts:—

"Q. There is one point on which I have not been able to get a very clear idea, but it has been stated—I might say officially—that quite recently a power of initiative in the matter of subjects to be brought before the War Office Council has been given to each member; that any member can ask that any subjects which he wishes to be proposed should be put on the agenda paper. Is that so?

A. So far as I know, everybody can do that. The Secretary of State would settle himself whether it should or should not be on the agenda; it is under his orders.

Q. That is the old system—that is the distinction. The old system was that the Secretary of State decided absolutely on the agenda paper, and excluded or included subjects at his discretion. But we have been told that now any member might ask that a question should be put on the agenda paper and that it will be put?

A. I believe it is the case. I never heard anybody say they could not get a question on the agenda paper.

Q. We were also told that it had never been done; is that the case?

A. I never heard of it" (10802, *seq.*).

It is evident that the soldiers regarded their power of initiative as merely nominal, and con-

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sidered it a recognized rule that the Secretary of State should control the selection of the subjects to be discussed by the Council. It was, to them, a point of etiquette. But under the circumstances, they considered etiquette as binding as a formal prohibition.

The history of the Army Board, now abolished, supplies a similar example of cross purposes. Mr. Brodrick, for instance, considered that, by certain action which he took, he had "unshackled" this body. Lord Roberts said that he "knocked it on the head." It would be superfluous to enter into the details. The important conclusion is this:—So long as the Secretary of State, feeling that he is accountable to Parliament for what happens at the War Office, and may be challenged on this, that, or the other point any day in the Session, desires to keep in his own hands as much immediate control in all directions as possible, while the soldiers feel that military men should themselves manage Army matters without the tutelage and governance of the Secretary of State, there is little likelihood of an *entente cordiale* in the War Department.

Reference has already been made to the attempt to differentiate between "supervision" and "control," which appears to have led to confusion in the mind of those whom the distinction was intended to help. General Sir Richard Harrison, the Inspector-General of Fortifications, was asked:—

"In your department, do you work directly under the Commander-in-Chief?"

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He replied : " I suppose I do. I am supposed to be under the Secretary of State, I think. I am partly under the Commander-in-Chief and partly under the Secretary of State " (1972).

It seems scarcely possible that the work of a department can be done promptly and without hitches under a *condominium*, especially when there is jealousy and friction between the respective heads of the dual control. I mention the matter here because there seem to be grounds for apprehension that a similar *condominium* has now been established in the case of the General Staff.

A tendency which has demonstrably had an effect almost as injurious as this division of authority is that of responsible soldiers only " to speak when they are spoken to," and to preserve at other times a disciplined silence in their relations with higher officials in the hierarchy, whether military or civilian. The following extract from the evidence of Sir Richard Harrison gives a case in point :—

" Q. Before the Commander-in-Chief's Committee was established at the end of June, 1899, was there any regular formal means of pressing views on the War Office generally other than by memoranda to the Secretary of State, or by personal interviews with him ?

A. Of expressing views ?

Q. Of pressing views, not expressing views ; such views as that of the necessity of having stores ready ; was there any regular formal system such as now exists in the War Office Council, I assume ?

A. We have had the Army Board as long as I have been at the War Office.

Q. And at the Army Board were general subjects of that kind brought up ?

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A. Yes; you could bring up anything.

Q. And was it the practice to do so?

A. So far as I know. You see, the war began very soon after I became Inspector-General of Fortifications, and then the Army Board sat regularly; we sat almost every day at first.

Q. You joined on the 18th of April, 1898, did you not?

A. Yes.

Q. That was eighteen months before the war?

A. Yes. I do not know quite what you mean by your question. I should not bring up my own private ideas before any Board or Council that I know of unless I were asked.

Q. My point is that you, among other great officers at the War Office, had a feeling that war was not improbable in South Africa?

A. Yes.

Q. Would you under those circumstances, consider what you would need in case of war breaking out?

A. I had my own ideas about what would happen.

Q. And at moments of great tension in South Africa would you bring those views in any way before the Army Board?

A. *If I were asked*" (1935, seq.).

A still more serious instance of failure to reach an understanding, due to a similar reticence, arose when Sir Redvers Buller, having been nominated to the command in South Africa in the summer of 1899, was expecting to receive his instructions from the Government, while Lord Lansdowne was expecting General Buller to apply, on his own initiative, for the information and advice which he needed.

It was a typical instance of cross purposes between the politician and the soldier. The latter waited for his orders; the former waited till application was

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made to him, and “ matters drifted.” The reforms of the Committee of Three will render the recurrence of such an incident practically impossible. The difficulty which it illustrates, however, cannot be removed by administrative action.

But by far the most serious misunderstanding was that which arose between Lord Lansdowne and Lord Wolseley with regard to the defence of Natal—a misunderstanding which nearly brought about the fall of Ladysmith and might have caused the collapse of the Empire. The facts can be quite briefly stated :—

On August 1, 1899, there was in South Africa “ a total fighting force of 8,500 men.”—(Appendix Vol. p. 14.)

On August 2 Lord Lansdowne wrote to Lord Wolseley that, to “ strengthen our own position, to reassure the colonists, and, above all, to strengthen our diplomacy during the new phase which is commencing,” the Government proposed to send out reinforcements of 2,000 men “ or thereabouts,” and on the same day Lord Wolseley wrote in reply, “ I am very glad it is contemplated to add some 2,000 or 3,000 men to our force in Natal.”—(Report Vol. p. 264.)

On August 18 Lord Wolseley wrote that with an additional force of about 10,000 men, the whole of the northern triangle of Natal could be occupied and held.—(Report Vol. p. 20.)

The decision to send out the 10,000 men was made on *September* 9. Lord Lansdowne said, in his evidence :—

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“Although it appears from these minutes that Lord Wolseley would have liked to have sent these reinforcements sooner than we sent them, he told me on the day that the decision to send the 10,000 men had been arrived at that he would ‘stake his reputation that *after the reinforcements have arrived* we shall be safe as to everything south of the Biggarsberg.’ I say that confidently, because the statement impressed me so much that I at once wrote it to one of my colleagues” (21167).

The phrasing of the assurance given by Lord Wolseley is important. By “south of the Biggarsberg” he seems clearly to have meant *Natal* south of that position; and it is obvious that when he said “after the reinforcements have arrived,” he meant after they had taken up their defensive or offensive position, and not merely when they had set foot in the colony.

Lord Lansdowne said further in his evidence:—

“Before I leave that question of the sufficiency of the reinforcements, may I say a word upon another point, which is, that it might be suggested, and I believe it has been suggested, that these reinforcements were sufficient to take care of themselves during the interval (before the arrival of the field force); but that is, I am sure, not at all what was conveyed to me by my military advisers. What was conveyed to me by my military advisers was that they were sufficient to secure the safety of *the Colonies*, which is quite a different thing” (21170).

An instant's consideration of the position of affairs in Cape Colony at that time will show the enormous difference between guaranteeing the safety

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of Natal south of the Biggarsberg and answering for the security of "the Colonies" in South Africa.

On October 1, 1899, there was a total force of 14,704 troops in Natal, "including a certain proportion of men belonging to the Royal Engineers, and to the Army Service, Ordnance, Medical, and Pay Corps."—(Report Vol. p. 21.)

The sequence of the addition of reinforcements was explained by Lord Lansdowne :—

"The South African garrison was increased first from a normal of 2,000 to 7,000, and eventually to 23,000, when the larger reinforcements were sent out *in September, 1899*; these reinforcements, you will remember, *arrived just before the war broke out.*

Q. You mean the reinforcements from India ?

A. Partly from India and partly from other places—a reinforcement of 10,000 men altogether" (21160-1).

The number sent from India was 5,500 (21163).

General White and Colonel Ward arrived in Natal on October 7, 1899 (5694; 5696). Colonel Ward said in his evidence that between that date and November 2 "every truck that we could possibly get hold of was used to bring up supplies" to Ladysmith (5734), and that "as we landed, the Indian Brigade and the other troops were landing at the same time and moving up towards Ladysmith" (5935). On October 13 the Boers invaded Natal. It seems obvious that a large part of the reinforcements to which Lord Wolsley referred in giving his assurance arrived too late to prepare, provision, and occupy a defensive position on the Biggarsberg, even if

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General White had decided to establish himself there.

The Royal Commissioners wrote :—

“Taken as a whole, the evidence appears to support the position of the Government . . . that the steps taken to reinforce the troops in South Africa for defensive purposes, pending the arrival of the field force were in accordance with the advice and requirements of their military advisers.”—(Report, p. 28.)

It is, however, an act of bare justice to so distinguished a soldier as Lord Wolseley to point out that the conditions which his guarantee presupposed were non-existent when Natal was invaded, and that this was due to that delay in sending the reinforcements against which he had consistently protested.

These remarks are not made with the object of justifying Lord Wolseley's strategy or his forecast. In the light of subsequent events, his opinion, expressed in June, 1899, that “the operations should begin in South Africa as soon as possible, so as to be over next November” (Report Vol. p. 262), seems ill-considered to the last degree, though, as the Commissioners wrote :—

“In the judgment of an observer well qualified to give an authoritative opinion—Sir John French—the addition to the force in Natal of a brigade of 5,000 men would have turned the scale in the operations after the battle of Elandslaagte ; and it is difficult to form any conception of the differences in the whole course of the war which might have been the result” (p. 28).

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My object in referring to this most serious misunderstanding is to emphasize the fact that politicians are not suitable judges of military requirements, and that when the latter are subordinated, beyond a point, to political considerations, they cannot be carried out effectively.

CHAPTER VII

THE GENERAL STAFF

THE most important change which has been made in our military organization by the Committee of Three is the establishment of a General Staff. This, of course, can only be regarded as an innovation if we limit our view to the history of our own army. In the case of the Continental Great Powers it has long been recognized that the preparatory duties which are properly assigned to a Thinking Department, and the executive duties which can be best controlled by a Thinking Department, ought to be entrusted to a body with definite authority and responsibility in these matters. The character of the work which is assigned to this body in Germany is described in the following paragraph :—

“The *Chief of the General Staff* (assisted by Quartermaster-General) superintends training of staff officers, works out in his railway section all arrangements for concentration of army in case of war, prepares plans for all possible campaigns, collects military information regarding foreign countries, compiles military histories and maps, superintends survey of Germany, examines

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and approves of plans of Army Corps Commanders for autumn manœuvres, inspects and comments on their reports on the manœuvres and the capabilities of all officers engaged therein. He has nothing to do with finance, beyond application of specific sums allotted to his department, and has no concern with the discipline and routine duties of troops, which are the province of Army Corps Commanders. As to organization he consults with War Minister. In general, he studies in peace the method of employment of army in war, and directs military operation. He is kept *au courant* with foreign affairs by the Foreign Office, and is a member of the Defence Committee. Being a permanent official he can lay down and gradually develop a continuous and far-sighted line of high military policy.”—(Appendices to *Report of Hartington Commission*, p. 91.)

We have seen that the Hartington Commission recommended this great reform, which was opposed by Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman as “unnecessary.”

The reader requires no technical knowledge in order to understand the importance of the work of the General Staff. A glance at the list of its duties quoted above will show that this department is not merely the brain but—if one may carry the simile a step further—the whole nervous system of the Army. Just as the nerves of the body bring us every sensation which warns us how we stand in relation to the world around us, so this great Thinking Department, through its ramifications, receives the intelligence which shows what dangers menace the Army and what advantages it has. And just as our nerves, by their efferent

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strands, move our muscles in accordance with the dictates of the brain, so the Thinking Department systematizes, co-ordinates and renders timely and purposeful every action of the great fighting organism which it directs.

It may be argued that the General Staff work which has to be undertaken on behalf of a big army like that of Germany is much greater than that which our small force necessitates. This is a mistake. The governing consideration ought to be not the magnitude of the force, the mere number of the troops, but the magnitude and number of the *problems* to be faced. In this respect the possible wars—other than expeditions against African tribes—in which the German Empire might become involved, and the scenes of the operations are fewer, and very much fewer, than the campaigns which Great Britain might have to organize on any Continent.

When we have established a department of the General Staff, manned it adequately, given it sufficient monetary support, and concentrated in it the work of the ablest minds which the Service can supply to the study of strategy and preparation for war, it will certainly repay the cost. We shall know, if we become involved in hostilities, that we shall enter upon them with every advantage that forethought can give us in the first steps. As Lord Roberts pointed out to the Royal Commission on the War, that would probably mean everything in making the outcome not failure but success.

Under the new system generals would not leave

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for the scene of action without instructions and without knowledge of the part which those commanding locally were to play in the opening of the general plan of campaign. When Sir George White was appointed to the command in Natal he was Quartermaster-General at Headquarters. He walked out of his room at the War Office, not across to the Intelligence Department, where they would have told him what the old-standing and avowed designs of the Boers with regard to Natal were, and what they thought of Ladysmith as a defensible position; not into any office of any department where he could learn the general scheme of operations or the wishes and purposes of the Government—he walked out of the building uninformed as to every essential particular, and he landed in South Africa, a country in which he had never been before; he fell under the influence of a Colonial Government that had its own political ends to serve; he left a force exposed at Glencoe and he undertook the defence of Ladysmith, which the Commander-in-Chief had not selected as a place to defend, and which those who had studied the site never dreamed of holding. Sound information, skilled advice, were available in the building in which Sir George White was when he received his appointment. Under the system which seems to have satisfied Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman it was not utilized. If there had been a Chief of the General Staff with the authority and responsibility which ought to attach to his office, he would not have ruined his reputation and jeopardized

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the whole Empire by allowing such a collapse of administrative common-sense. And Sir George White would himself have been a member of the General Staff.

No blame, as has been said, can rightly be attached to the Intelligence Department. It was undermanned and "starved," and it had suffered from those frequent unsystematic changes which impaired efficiency at the War Office so much. The subjoined paragraph gives its history in brief:—

"In 1873 an Intelligence branch was created at the War Office. At first it was placed under the Adjutant-General, then under the Quartermaster-General, then under the Adjutant-General once more. In 1888 the head of the department was named Director of Military Intelligence. He remained subordinate to the Adjutant-General till 1895, when he came under the direct control of the Commander-in Chief."

The following is a description of the work for which, prior to the war, *two officers and one clerk* were provided. It should be remembered that hostilities at the Cape had long been probable.

"Except as regards the preparation of maps, Intelligence duties connected with South Africa were assigned to the section of the Intelligence Department which was charged with the strategical consideration of defence schemes at home and abroad, and with the collation of information concerning the British Colonies, Protectorates, and spheres of influence.

"This Section had to carry out the following work:—
(a) An annual examination and revision of schemes of home and colonial defence, and the conduct of correspondence arising therefrom with the

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Admiralty, Colonial Office, and other departments of the State.

- (b) The observation of military operations conducted in any part of the Empire, except India, including those conducted by local forces working under the orders of the Foreign Office or Colonial Office, both of which departments looked to the Intelligence Division for military advice, whenever emergencies occurred. It may be noted that no less than 30 of these small wars took place during the years 1896-9, some of them, such as the Uganda mutiny, the Sierra Leone rebellion, and the operations in West Africa, 1897-8, involving questions of some difficulty and complexity.
- (c) A study of the organization, numerical strength, and efficiency of the Colonial forces of the Empire, and consultation with the Colonial Office and Foreign Office on questions relating to their administration.
- (d) The collation and submission to the Commander-in-Chief of information concerning the military forces and plans of the two South African Republics.
- (e) A study of boundary questions affecting British Colonies and Protectorates, and consultation with the Colonial Office and Foreign Office thereon.
- (f) The collation, preparation, and distribution of information concerning the resources and topography of all parts of the Empire, except the United Kingdom and India.
- (g) The consideration of strategical questions connected with submarine cables and their control in war.

“The Director of Military Intelligence’s responsibility or the provision of maps for South Africa mainly de-

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volved on the mapping section of the Intelligence Division. This section, which was, and is, concerned with the provision of maps required for military purposes throughout the Empire, *had a permanent staff of two officers.*"—(Report Vol. p. 154.)

The question of military mapping is of the utmost importance, and the treatment of it in this country, before and after 1899, exemplifies the notions which then prevailed, and which still prevail widely, as to the scale upon which provision should be made for staff work. It is worth while to bring forward some facts which bear upon the subject.

Major Hills, in his evidence before the Royal Commission, compared the topographical staffs maintained by Continental nations with our own. He said :—

" In Germany the Colonial mapping is in the hands of an expert geographer to the Colonial Office, Baron von Danckelman, who collects all his material from the surveys carried out by German officers in the colonies and incorporates them in maps, which are produced by the firm of D. Reimer in Berlin. . . . A similar arrangement obtains in the case of the German Foreign Office, which also has a geographer, Herr E. Vohsen, who is again in close connexion with the same firm of map publishers. We have no means of knowing the annual expenditure upon surveys or map-making, but the resulting maps are of a high degree of excellence, well printed, and apparently of considerable accuracy. . . . In France the topographical staff is composed of 149 officers and 83 subordinates, and spent £75,000 last year (1901) ; in Italy the staff is 216 officers and 120 subordinates, and spends £20,000 ; in Russia the staff is 46 officers or

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officials (the "officials" in the Russian War Office are equivalent in rank to officers in ours) and 112 subordinates, and we have no means of knowing how much they spend; in England we have three officers and 25 subordinates, and we spend £6,500 a year. In France the Mapping Department does some of the work which in England is the province of the Ordnance Survey, i.e. it produces the French equivalent to our one-inch map" (871).

Moreover, prior to the war, our Intelligence Department "possessed no means of producing maps" (Report, p. 130). But it had "copies of all the published maps in the world" (Grant, 862), and, as to unpublished maps, "we have anything that we can beg, borrow, or steal; but we have never bought any" (863).

‡ An important question of national policy arises in connexion with the services of the Mapping Section, which will in future be under the control of the Chief of the General Staff. There are "many parts of the Empire of which there are no suitable maps" (Nicholson, 136). Is it desirable that surveying should be undertaken on an extensive scale, to make good this deficiency? Various proposals and estimates were put before the Royal Commission by the topographical officers who gave evidence. Major Hills said: "I think that with about £150,000 a year you could place on a sound basis a department which would make a topographical survey of the Empire" (881). The following is an extract from the evidence of Sir W. Nicholson:—

"I presume that the Intelligence Department would

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prepare such maps as it could beforehand, not in anticipation of war, but they would have maps of a possible theatre of war?—For possible theatres of war in various parts of the Empire it is an exceedingly desirable thing to do; and if the Treasury would be prepared to let us have, say, £80,000 a year to do it, I should be most glad to undertake it; but if you reflect—for example, take the theatre of war in South Africa—to make a reasonably good map of the Transvaal, the Orange River Colony, and Cape Colony (there is no map of Cape Colony at present suitable for military purposes; we hope they are going to start one) would take five or six years, at an expenditure of about £200,000 or £300,000” (135).

Major Hills told the Commission that the staff of the Topographical Department of the War Office was “very inadequate,” and added, “I think a reasonable staff for a department of this character would be about 13 officers and 53 subordinates, costing about £17,000 per annum” (888).

Sir John Ardagh made some interesting comments on this suggestion, and upon the whole problem, in the following passage of his evidence. He had mentioned to the Commissioners that he had put forward an estimate for an extension of surveying in South Africa which would have involved an expenditure of about £18,000 a year for ten years (5005). That was in 1898.

“What I rather meant in my former question was whether you ever put forward an estimate for a grant, an increased grant, from the Treasury here, for the purposes of your department in the matter of mapping in South Africa?—I put forward an official

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application to the War Office, but it received so much cold water from the financial point of view that it came to nothing. The end of my proposal of £18,000 a year for ten years was an offer of £100.

“Did the cold water come from the War Office financial tap or the Treasury?—It never got as far as the Treasury. The practical fact which had to be dealt with by the War Office was, that the War Office wanted so much money for so many different purposes, that they would not put forward a survey in the claim for further grants when there were so many other matters which they considered of more importance, and which they desired to press first.

“Did you ever form any opinion as to the amount of money that ought to be added to your department’s estimates to carry out the mapping work?—I am sorry to say that mapping work is a very much more expensive matter than the War Office or public departments in general, except those who have had to deal with the Ordnance Survey, and the Survey of India, have any conception of. I think the Survey of India costs very nearly a quarter of a million a year; and as regards the Ordnance Survey, I cannot recollect the exact figures, but it certainly must run to considerably over £100,000. The sum which I should be disposed to ask for for the Intelligence Department now would be a modest sum, not all that I think should be eventually granted, but something to build up a real and efficient Survey Department, suitable for Colonial and Imperial military surveying; but £20,000 a year is such a very large sum in comparison with what is now spent on the Intelligence Department, that I had a feeling that if we were to ask for it, it would be scoffed at in the War Office before it ever got to the Treasury.

“And therefore it would be difficult for the Director of Military Intelligence to put it forward?—It would be very difficult for him to put it forward. I think there are, perhaps, other things, which, if he had an offer of £20,000 a year, he would be disposed

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to expend that sum upon before starting a survey section."

It is right that not only the Government but Parliament should apply the closest criticism to schemes which involve such heavy charges, especially when—as in every military department—there are conflicting claims for the "first call" on money. But, since trustworthy maps are not only highly serviceable in war, but very valuable in time of peace, seeing how many industrial enterprises they help, and especially remunerative constructive works in new countries, it may not be irrelevant to contrast the expenditure which would be involved by the sanction of an Imperial survey with that which was actually incurred when a certain transaction had to be carried out without previous organization ; to compare, in a word, the return to be had for money spent on precautions with that to be had for money spent on preparing in haste. We could have a topographical survey of the empire at a cost of about £150,000 a year. When we were called upon suddenly to supply mounts and baggage animals in numbers far in excess of our estimated requirements, "the Remount Department spent about fourteen millions on horses, donkeys and mules" (13003), and the average cost was £23 a head, *including mules and donkeys* (13004). "Out of 518,794 horses supplied, 347,007 were expended," largely owing to the fact that they had to be sent to the front immediately after debarkation (12928). Therefore, taking horses *alone* into consideration,

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we spent a sum of £7,981,161 for which we had nothing to show but fatter vultures and bones on the veldt. The interest on this amount at 3 per cent. would give an income of £239,434 a year. If the horses had had time to recuperate after landing, and could have been properly cared for on the way up country, in a word, if we had foreseen our needs, the loss of money and animals would have been far less.

The Intelligence Department is now merged in the General Staff. The Committee of Three wrote :—"We are convinced that, in spite of a necessary and most desirable increase in the cost of the branch under the Chief of the General Staff, our proposals will lead to a reduction of expenditure on the administration of the Army" (Third letter to the Prime Minister). If any one doubts that an increase of expenditure in this direction is "necessary and most desirable," I would urge him to give careful consideration to the facts referred to in the second and third chapters of this book.

What has the Committee of Three now substituted for an undermanned Intelligence Department under an overworked Commander-in-Chief?

"A General Staff, as the term is understood in all well-organized armies," the Reformers wrote, "consists of a department which devotes its undivided attention to military problems in the widest sense, and of a body of officers occupied in peace in the training of all ranks of the Army and prepared to direct operations in the field."—(Report, Part II, p. 22.)

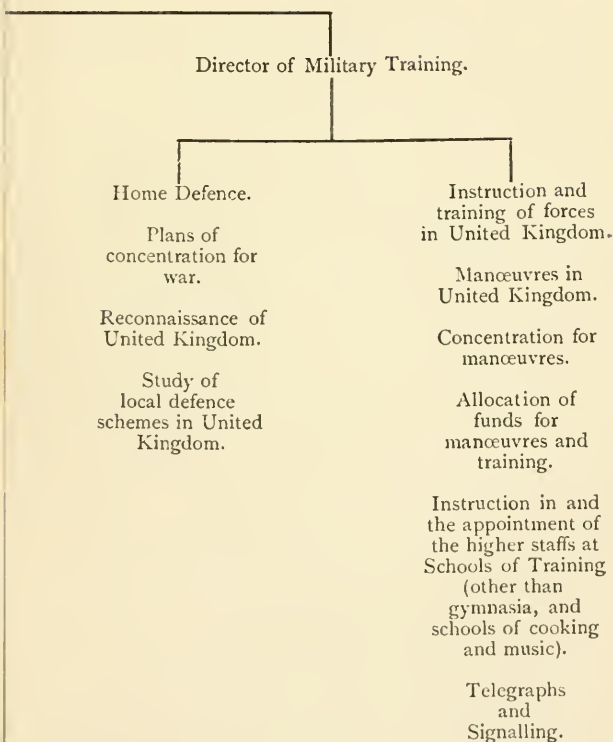
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For the attainment of these objects the Committee has drawn up a plan of construction for the Chief of the General Staff's department, which is admirably logical and complete. If the reader will refer to the accompanying diagram, reproduced from the Committee's report, he will see that the work assigned to the three Directors falls into a "natural" division. Provision is made that there shall be as little as possible of that waste of energy and ability which results from allotting incongruous duties to the same officer. And there is no overlapping of functions. The scheme ought to ensure that the worst danger which menaced our arms on land—inadequate preparation followed by disorganized action—is removed once for all. The Committee's plan does not show an invariable adherence to the German model; one or two divergences of importance have already been mentioned. It is certain that there will be much controversy upon the technical questions raised by them. But the opinion of the Reformers upon these subjects ought to carry very great weight; it is clear that they have given anxious thought to details, and, obviously, the requirements of an Empire which is scattered over the globe and whose home-frontier is protected by the navy differ markedly in certain respects from those of a Continental State.

With regard to the General Staff scheme devised by the Committee of Three, only two questions remain before the country.

Will the public recognize the vital need of this

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new system to the safety of the Empire and insist that it shall be adopted and maintained in the thorough and liberal manner which can alone make it *efficient and real*?

Will the political chiefs in future, when war is probable, allow the Department to make adequate preparations in time? Will they adopt its plan of campaign for the military forces as a whole and in due season, or will they stultify its work by hesitation and delay, by the adoption of parts of rival schemes constructed under different supervision or by patching up a plan in which "political considerations" override the first principles of military prudence and hand over every advantage to the enemy before he strikes?

CHAPTER VIII

STAFF DUTIES IN THE FIELD

THE General Staff, as the Committee of Three have pointed out, is not only a Thinking, but a Training Department. The latter branch of its work is almost as important as the former. In this respect again the scheme of the Reformers follows the Prussian model in general outline.

In Germany the chief instrument for training is the War Academy (*Kriegsakademie*), which is finely described in Mr. Spenser Wilkinson's phrase as a "military university." The working of this institution has been tersely and admirably depicted by him :—

"The Prussian General Staff numbers altogether about 200 officers, ninety of whom are distributed among the divisions and Army Corps (four, those of Saxony, Würtemberg, and the two of Bavaria do not belong to the Prussian Army), whilst about 100, half of whom belong to the auxiliary establishment, form the great General Staff at Berlin. Service in the Staff Office of a division or Army Corps alternates with employment on the great General Staff, so that the officer whose diligence and ability have opened for him the staff career, and whose performance secures his periodical return to it, passes

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through the various stages of regimental service, of service on the General Staff of the great constituent units of the Army, and of employment in the great central agency of direction. . . .

“The influence of the general staff is not limited to the work of the 200 officers who compose it at any given time. Many of the commanders of regiments and battalions have been members of the general staff, and are taking their turn of practice with the troops. *Nearly all the higher commanders have passed through the various stages of duty in the general staff. The great general staff is perpetually training fresh generations.* Some sixty junior officers are temporarily attached to it without being incorporated, that is, without ceasing to belong to their regiments. They are the pick of the 100 lieutenants who every year leave the Kriegsakademie at Berlin. They work for a year at the central general staff office, under the personal supervision of the chief of the general staff of the army, who thus acquires an intimate knowledge of their ability and character. At the end of their year they rejoin their regiments. After a term of regimental work the best of them will be chosen as captains to the general staff, to fill up vacancies caused by promotions. In this way the general staff keeps up its numbers by the continual selection of the fittest.”—(*The Brain of an Army.*)

The Englishman who reads of a general staff as a separate corps with a distinctive uniform is apt to fashion a bogey by the help of his imagination, that of the spectacled, sedentary officer who would not move to attack a horde of savages or a handful of fanatics without consulting an encyclopædia of military works of reference. The passage already cited shows how false such a notion is in relation to the German General Staff. Bodily fitness is

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as rigidly required in this branch of the service as in any other. The whole training is practical, and the Academy course ends with a "practice tour," especially designed to test an officer's aptitude for field work. A concise but complete description of the methods of instruction is given in Mr. Spenser Wilkinson's invaluable book.

The system ensures that staff officers of all ranks in the German Army shall be skilled and efficient men, scientifically educated for their duties. Moreover, it has created, and it maintains throughout the staff organization an *esprit de corps* and a unity of method which secure a ready and good understanding among all members of the body. It is only necessary to glance at a few of the heads of the work of staff officers with troops to comprehend the enormous advantage of this result. They have "to get accurate information with regard to positions, the value of ground, and how troops can best be disposed" (Lord Roberts, 13163). They must, of course, be able to "read" maps sketched by others. Within their sphere are "water supply, movements and reconnaissances, and knowledge of the enemy and his whereabouts, and selection of camps" (Sir Ian Hamilton, 13934-5). These are only samples of the duties. It would scarcely be an exaggerated simile if one said that the staff form the wheels on which the military engine moves.

The Committee of Three have shown themselves fully aware of the importance of *practical* training:—

"We consider it essential that the branch of the Chief

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of the General Staff employed at the War Office should not become a sedentary bureau. The Chief of the General Staff and the Director of Military Training should be present at all large manœuvres, and as many of the officers as possible should be employed in Umpiring, or in General Staff duties. Officers employed in Intelligence work should be detailed for that work to forces operating in the countries they have studied, and should in peace time become personally acquainted with those countries.

“The branch of the Chief of the General Staff at the War Office must also be turned to account for the education of General Staff Officers as well as for the training of the Army. With this object, officers selected by the Commandant of the Staff College should be attached to the Branch.”

The following passage shows how the British Staff system now established conforms in its main features to that which has proved so brilliantly successful in Germany :—

“The General Staff should be recruited mainly from the Staff College” (corresponding to the *Kriegsakademie*), “entry to which should, as now, be by competitive examination. Nominations should be in the hands of the Chief of the General Staff. As a condition of admission to the examination, officers should, after recommendation by commanding officers, or by a General Officer Commanding in Chief, be attached for at least three months on probation to the General Staff. The responsibility involved in making recommendations should be impressed upon General and Commanding Officers. As a general principle, continuous employment on the General Staff should be restricted to four years, and should, in all cases, qualify an officer for accelerated promotion. The titles of officers during the periods of their Staff employ should be ‘Colonel,

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Lieut.-Colonel,' etc., 'of the General Staff.' The present misapplication of the title 'Colonel on the Staff' should cease. Distinctions of uniform in peace and badges clearly marking General Staff officers in war are essential. The entire administration and distribution of the General Staff, whether at the War Office, or in the commands, should rest with the Chief of the General Staff, who should, however, in making selections, meet the wishes of General Officers Commanding-in-Chief as far as possible."—(*Report of the Committee of Three*, Part II, pp. 23-4.)

The Conservative Englishman will ask himself—and rightly—whether such a sweeping change in our military customs is absolutely needful, and whether "the necessary expense will be amply justified"—to borrow the words of the Committee. I do not believe that a greater menace to the safety of the Army and the Empire existed anywhere than in our former method of providing Staff Officers, and I doubt if the public realizes how dangerous and vicious that method was. Unless it and the ruinous influences which supported it are abolished not only on paper but in fact, one may almost say that the labour of the Reformers will have been bestowed in vain.

Military posts of the utmost importance were given to men who had neither the experience nor the competency which would have justified their selection, and in some instances the distribution of duties was so badly managed that an efficient officer would have had no opportunity to do his work satisfactorily.

It is worth while, in this connexion, to quote a

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few typical opinions as to the way in which staff duties in the field were discharged under the old system. Sir R. Pole-Carew said, "The staff was beneath contempt really, looking to the orders and counter orders, and after orders, and the confusion there was in the staff" (16601).

Lord Roberts expressed his judgment in the following passage of his evidence:—

"Those officers who had received previous training, either in active service, or at the Staff College, generally did well; but the absence of a definite system of staff duties, leading sometimes to an overlapping of responsibilities, sometimes to waste of time, and sometimes to a neglect of indispensable precautions, was undoubtedly prejudicial to the smooth running of the military machine. Officers were often called upon to take up duties of which they had no previous knowledge; and while it was remarkable in the great majority of cases how quickly they became efficient, the mistakes that were made by the staff had most serious consequences. Many instances of indifferent staff-work might be quoted, and it seems clear that the entire staff should be thoroughly trained; that a definite system of carrying out staff duties should be laid down; and that we should have enough trained staff officers to supply, in case of emergency, a large Army. On such occasions there is no difficulty in obtaining men of such good quality that they very soon become trustworthy soldiers. But staff officers cannot be improvised; nor can they learn their duties, like the rank and file, in a few weeks or months, for their duties are as varied as they are important. I am decidedly of opinion that we cannot have a first-rate Army, unless we have a first-class Staff, well educated, constantly practised at manœuvres, and with wide experience" (10447).

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And this judgment was supported by Lord Kitchener :—

“ The officers on the staff are very mixed. Some were excellent, whilst others had no staff training, and had everything to learn. There was no reserve of qualified staff officers to fill vacancies. The tendency on the part of some generals and commanders to do their own staff work was noticeable, and should be discontinued ” (174).

It seems scarcely possible to doubt that Mr. Amery's indictment of the old unscientific system was well grounded :—

“ With regard to the staff work generally throughout the Army, there was no clearness about the functions of the staff officer in war ; somebody who was a very good fighter, because he wanted to be in South Africa, was attached as Chief Staff Officer to somebody, although he had no staff officer qualifications ; others were good staff officers in peace, and excellent men to know all the Army Orders and to fight with the War Office from Aldershot, but were not good fighting staff officers. I do not know that there is any good in giving instances, but the fearful staff muddling was in everybody's mouth ; and with regard to many of the things that went wrong you invariably heard people say, ‘ The staff was so hopeless,’ or ‘ We were never told this.’ At the battle of Ladysmith the staff work went to pieces very badly. Other instances besides Ladysmith were Stormberg, Modder River, and the loss of the Waterval convoy, and there were many other unfortunate incidents with regard to which bad staff work had a great deal to do.

“ In the field I do not think nearly enough importance was assigned to the Intelligence officer, and anybody was made Intelligence officer ; there were not enough of them, and they were hopelessly overworked. As a

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rule, any junior officer was made Intelligence officer, and he probably had to do press censorship and permits as well. In one case at Estcourt there was a lieutenant, a very capable young officer, who did very well afterwards, and after we had been there a fortnight or more altogether, I was referring to a very important feature—a wall running right outside the village of Estcourt—and I found he did not know of its existence, because he had arrived at Estcourt at night, and had never been outside the hotel into which he went, because he was so fully employed with issuing permits, map-making, and other work; but to have an Intelligence officer who does not even know the visible features of the place outside is not a good state of affairs. In the same way, when General Gatacre marched to Stormberg, he left behind that day the officer who had been his Intelligence officer up till then, who had been at Stormberg all the time, and knew the district intimately; and there is no doubt that if that officer had been there, as he knew the particular farms where the force halted on the night of the march, he could have told General Gatacre exactly where he was, and where to go to" (20447).

So little did those in authority under the former *régime* comprehend the right ideal of staff efficiency that it was a common incident to find an officer who had been performing staff duties on the Adjutant-General's side—disciplinary work, to use a general term—transferred to the Quartermaster-General's side, where technical knowledge of quite a different kind is required. Another instance—in the German Army a primary and essential acquirement of a staff officer is the ability to write clear and unmistakably intelligible orders. In our service there were—and are—few men possessing this elementary qualification, and it is a

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fact that during the late war *it was unusual to issue written orders*. Verbal and vague directions were given even in the most critical cases. The lost guns at Colenso, the confusion at Magersfontein, will serve to remind the reader of the effects of this development of "war without science."

Staff appointments were too often given from motives of favouritism or withheld from motives of prejudice. And there was no *standard* to which all officers who entered this branch of the service were required to conform.

It may perhaps be urged that by creating a powerful and able General Staff on Continental lines we are creating "a command within a command," and that when a general takes charge of an expedition he will be little more than the exponent of the views of his chief of the staff in the field. But, setting aside the fact that, if we adhere to the German system, the general himself would be a high Staff officer, it seems clear that British leaders have, as a rule, sufficient self-reliance and strength of will to insist on the execution of their own plans by their subordinates. And no one can fail to see how much more advantageous would have been the position of Sir Redvers Buller and Sir George White in South Africa in 1899 if each had had the advice of a highly trained "Chief of the Staff," who knew all that was known at Headquarters about military positions in South Africa, and had entered into the plan of initial strategy which had been drawn up by the highest strategical authorities at home—an assistant who would have had *solli-*

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darité alike with his chiefs in Pall Mall and every subordinate staff officer in the field.

Will the General Staff attract the right men? An idea is prevalent that British officers are wanting in intelligence and zeal for their profession. Nothing could be farther from the truth. Intelligence and zeal are there in abundance, besides all the finest qualities which go to make a good soldier.¹ But the material is very frequently wasted.

The same road to promotion and distinction should be open to all, and all who seek promotion should be obliged to travel by it. Until recently, though an officer might have qualified himself at the Staff College, etc., it did not follow that he would obtain

¹ Take, e.g., the opinion of General French :—

"(b) Training of Regimental Officers."

"The self-denial, energy, and general discretion displayed by the regimental officer of the Regular Army throughout the South African War are beyond all praise. His character as a thorough sportsman and a gentleman will last in the traditions of this Empire. At the same time, chiefly owing to want of opportunity in peace time (*viz.*, few men or horses to train, with but little ground on which to drill and manœuvre in England) he took the field less proficient than he might have been in the tactical methods required by modern war. Looking back at the manner in which our regimental officers were constantly handicapped in their efforts to learn their work prior to the war, their attention to duty and general keenness in their work must be regarded as very remarkable."

Lord Wolseley said :—

"The British officers of the Regular troops are, I think, the finest men in the world, without any exception. They are the gentlemen of England. They are not always, perhaps, as highly educated as the officers of the German Army, but, taking them all in all, I think they are a very efficient body of men" (9178).

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the reward of his labours. He might find himself passed over in favour of a man who had never been "through the mill" at all, and whose social position or popularity had been considered, not his professional qualifications.

Every starter in the race should run the same course. So long as some can reach the winning-post by a short cut and take the prize, the less favoured will naturally be disheartened and disgusted. The old system of selecting and training staff officers in presence of the enemy was both dangerous and rotten.

All staff appointments, from A.D.C., upwards, should be the recognized rewards for professional ability, industry and merit. The choice of general officers in selecting their A.D.C.s should be limited to men who have staff qualifications. These appointments used often to be given to men who had no such qualifications. They were also made to serve the purpose of getting young officers who were in debt or who contemplated undesirable matrimonial alliances out of the country. The writer has in his mind certain instances of this abuse, and he has been told of a case in South Africa where the best qualification for appointment to a general officer's staff was the capacity to regale the Chief with a plentiful supply of stories—of a sort.

It is needless to dwell longer upon details. *If the system devised by the Committee of Three is adopted genuinely, and if it receives adequate monetary support from Parliament, the Army will*

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never again go to war with a distracted "brain" and rotten "nerves."

Before leaving the subjects which I have hitherto discussed I wish to safeguard myself against the supposition that this book is meant to lead to the conclusion that the Defence Committee ought to be abolished. It seems to me an invaluable institution for keeping the heads of the naval and military organization permanently in touch with the ruling political chiefs, and for acquainting the soldiers and sailors concerned with the views of the Cabinet of the time in regard to new political situations which affect the British Empire in any part of the world. My contention is that the Chief of the General Staff and the Senior Naval Lord should be *ex officio* members of that Committee, and that the Service representatives should have the position of advisory assessors, and should not be responsible for, or committed to, its policy—merely recognizing, as they certainly would, the duty of any professional member to resign if he considered that a course had been chosen which would be disastrous to the Empire. In this way the Service members would be withdrawn from political influences, which appear to be of the most dangerous kind. The "permanent nucleus" should cease to have its present advisory duties and should become simply the secretariat of the Defence Committee. Its co-ordinating duties should be transferred to a small Department subordinate to the Chief of the General Staff and the Senior Naval Lord, in whom the power of making appointments to the

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Department should be vested. It should have authority to consult and obtain information from other Government Offices.

The functions of a General Staff are scientific; they are perverted if political considerations control them. Calling in the soldiers when a part of the Empire is in peril is like calling in a surgeon when a patient is in danger. If, for reasons which have nothing whatever to do with surgery, the surgeon is not allowed to operate in time or take the other steps and precautions which he sees to be needful, he is useless—a mere unwilling accessory in destroying the patient's chance of recovery. Similarly, when war is an impending probability, if the soldiers are prevented by political considerations from making the necessary preparations, they are stultified—mere unwilling accessories in bringing calamities upon the nation.

Finally, I would urge that as the Empire becomes less and less a Confederacy, temporary and dissoluble, and more and more a Federation, “one and indivisible”—as it will, if Mr. Chamberlain's great plan is not defeated by those who do not know how to think imperially—the self-governing Colonies should be represented directly, not through the Colonial Office, on the Defence Committee. But that is more a problem of Imperial Federation than of War Office Reconstitution.

CHAPTER IX

THE REORGANIZED FORCES

THE Committee of Three wrote :—

“The question of the reorganization of the military forces of the Crown is one which stands outside the terms of our reference. We claim only to have devised the machinery which will enable this problem to be worthily solved, and we are convinced that efficiency and economy are unattainable until the War Office has been completely reconstituted in accordance with the principles we have laid down.”—(Report, Part III, p. 29.)

On July 14 Mr. Arnold-Forster expounded in the House of Commons a scheme for reorganizing the Army. The work of the Committee of Three in reforming the War Office was treated practically as a *fait accompli*, and only brief allusion was made to it. The Secretary of State for War said :—

“The whole of the War Office organization has been reconstituted in accordance with the recommendations of the Esher Committee . . . We have followed the advice almost *literatim* and *verbatim* of the body which, in my opinion at any rate, was well qualified to advise us, and whose advice, I believe, was given in consonance with the wider learning, if I may say so, of professional opinion throughout the world.”—(*Times* Report.)

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Scarcely anything more was said upon the subject, but one sentence, I confess, raised some doubt in my mind as to whether the old confusion and misconception are not being allowed to creep in. That phrase was "The Intelligence Branch of the War Office has been greatly strengthened." One might almost infer from this that the Intelligence Branch still remained a separate unit and had not been merged in the great general staff. If this were so, we should be as far off the establishment of a real general staff as we ever were. It cannot be too often repeated that the general staff should be the training school for *all* staff officers in the Army and that the Intelligence Branch is a subordinate department of the larger organization. The idea that the collection of intelligence is the principal function of the general staff has long been current in this country and is apparently dying hard. If a general staff has been formed the first step should now be to issue regulations as to admission, terms of service, pay, etc. This, so far as I am aware, has not been done.

Mr. Arnold-Forster described his scheme in general terms. Modifications of detail will no doubt be introduced. The future of the Cavalry, both as to arms and tactics, was left open to discussion. The problem of the Militia was dealt with in a tentative way. But certain principles were recognized and adopted, and it seems unquestionable to the writer that those principles, as far as they go, are sound and necessary to the efficiency of the Army. And the Six Army Corps scheme which,

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naturally, could not repair a breakdown by setting up a sham, was abandoned.

The two principles which have at length been recognized are :—

(1) “ That the modern soldier must be—what we have never doubted that the sailor must be—a *skilled* man. High skill means high training ; and this again implies time, opportunity, and capability.

(2) That home defence must, in the main, be entrusted to the Navy. Mr. Arnold-Forster said, ‘ The Committee of Defence, voicing, I believe, the universal opinion of all thinking men in this country, have come to the conclusion that the time has arrived when we must lay down as an axiom that the duty of the Army in this country is not primarily to stand with fixed bayonets around the coast, but to defend our possessions over sea.’ ”—(*Times* Report.)

With regard to the first point, the evidence given before the Royal Commission by those most capable of forming an authoritative opinion was conclusive. I will only quote a few words from the testimony of Lord Methuen.

“ Q. We have heard a good deal of evidence on the question of brains *versus* numbers ; supposing you were organizing an army at a fixed sum of money, would you rather have an army, say, 100 per cent. strong, as our Army is at present, or would you rather have it 60 per cent. of thoroughly trained men, with the money spent on training rather than on the increase of numbers ?

A. I prefer 60 per cent. thoroughly trained men.

Q. You attach more importance to brains than numbers ?

A. Von der Goltz says quite clearly in one of his books : This is the time when we have big armies ; but

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you mark my words, that the nation that will do the best is the nation that can produce a small army, but absolutely good, or words to that effect, and I am perfectly certain that what we want is a small army and thoroughly good.”—(Lord Methuen, 14370-1).

It would have been madness to rely in chief part on the Militia and Volunteers, under their old organization, to repel invasion.

The Duke of Norfolk's Commission reported in the following terms with regard to the Militia :—

“ The evidence which we have received satisfies us that the drill and training at present undergone by this force is insufficient to fit its units at short notice to oppose trained troops in the field. As regards the infantry, there is a consensus of opinion both among Militia officers and those Regular officers who have had special opportunities of observation, that the average Militia battalion would not be fit to take the field except after several months' continuous embodiment. We gather, however, that the garrison artillery would be fitted for its war duties within a shorter period.

“ The less the training of the rank and file, the higher is the training and knowledge required of the officer. The training of the Militia officer is inadequate to enable him properly to lead troops, and especially incompletely trained troops. Moreover, those Militia officers whose purpose in joining this force is to obtain commissions in the Regular Army, leave the force just as they are acquiring experience.

“ The Militia has no field artillery except three batteries, in which nearly one-third of the officers, non-commissioned officers, and men belong to the Regular Army. The force is imperfectly equipped for war. It has no Field Engineer *matériel*, and no transport. Beyond a limited attempt to form Militia brigades, it has not been organized for the field.

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“ The strength of battalions varies so much that their proper grouping into the larger tactical formations required for the field would be a matter of great difficulty. The strongest battalion is 1,307 strong, the weakest 207. There are 26 battalions over 800 strong, 26 under 400, and 9 under 300.

“ We are forced to the conclusion that the Militia, in its existing condition, is unfit to take the field for the defence of this country. We think, however, that its defects arise from causes beyond the control of its officers and men.”—(Report, p. 6.)

With regard to the Volunteers, the Commissioners wrote :—

“ The training of the Volunteers is carried on under considerable difficulties, as to both time and space, and is in many cases especially hampered by the want of easily accessible ranges. The efficiency of the different units varies greatly, and some reach a high level, but taking the force as a whole, neither the musketry nor the tactical training of the rank and file would enable it to face, with prospect of success, the troops of a Continental army.

“ The Volunteer Field Artillery lacks the requisite training and mobility. *The transport, equipment and artillery matériel of the Volunteer force are far from satisfactory.*

“ We have to look at the officers of the Volunteer force as the framework of an army. They are of very unequal quality. Many of them have given themselves an excellent military education and would be a valuable element in any army; the majority, however, have neither the theoretical knowledge nor the practical skill in the handling of troops which would make them competent instructors in peace or leaders in war. This inequality of attainment prevents the Volunteer force from acquiring the cohesion needed for war.

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“We are agreed in the conclusion that the Volunteer force, in view of the unequal military education of the officers, the limited training of the men, and the defects of equipment and organization is not qualified to take the field against a regular army.”—(Report, pp. 7 and 9.)

It is worth while to quote, in corroboration of this judgment, the following passage from the evidence given by Lord Roberts before the Royal Commission on the War :—

“Do you think that the present amount of training that the Militia receive—I believe it has been rather increased—is sufficient?—*No, not for the officers. The officers must have additional training, and so must the Volunteer officers if we are to be able to trust them.*

“In fact, you could not take any Volunteer battalion into the field now?—*No.*

“*. . . It is impossible under the present system to rely upon the Volunteers or upon the Militia. Some changes must be made; either they must have more training, or we must use some other means to create an Army.*

“You would not like to see a Militia regiment attacking the enemy in the way you described?—*Not without more training than they have at present.*

“And that applies still more to the Volunteers?—*Yes; there is no disguising the fact that you cannot trust them as they are at present trained—it is impossible.*

“Then you said that at present you could not trust the Volunteers and Militia. I suppose that would mean for service abroad or in the field?—*Well, I should say for service at home too.*

“Would you say that they were inefficient at the present time for home defence?—*I think they are inefficient, mainly because the officers are not sufficiently trained to command the men, and the men themselves have not had sufficient training.*

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“Then you do not consider it a satisfactory establishment in the meantime for home defence?—*No.*” (10364-72; 10397-99.)

This evidence was certainly not given with any intention of disparaging or discouraging the Volunteers as men. It is a question of training. Lord Wolseley said that most Volunteer battalions could supply a company “say, of one hundred men, and remarkably good men in every way, all round,” who “would have come as a body from a superior class of men to the ordinary rank and file of our Army,” and he thought that “as such they might be a very valuable addition to a battalion of the Line” (9338).

Lord Roberts said :—

“I should like to have an Army composed of men like the City Imperial Volunteers certainly. I do not know what they would cost, but I should like to have an Army of that sort. In a very few months they would be as good as our best soldiers” (10321).

I will only add to these quotations the following brief extract from a Minute written by Lord Wolseley in 1897 with regard to “composite corps” such as the Third Army Corps would have been under Mr. Brodrick’s scheme. The Fourth, Fifth and Sixth Army Corps would have been composed almost entirely of Militia and Volunteers :—

“A composite corps, composed partly of Regular troops, partly of Militia deficient in artillery, without Regular Field Engineers, and wanting in other services, *is not in reality an Army Corps at all, and it is a misnomer to call it so; it is nothing but a bad makeshift and*

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make-believe. If ever this country is invaded it will be by an army composed of picked troops, and we must not oppose picked troops with makeshifts. At least if we do, we shall meet with disaster."

And it must be remembered that under the old system, the Regulars who remained in this country and who would have been relied upon for its defence, were, to a very large extent, inefficient.

Sir Evelyn Wood gave the following evidence :—

"I thought you might ask me why we could only send out comparatively few (men) in the first instance. Out of the 100,000 for whom we were drawing pay there were between 35,000 and 40,000 ineffectives.

Q. For what reason ?

A. They were too young to go—lads who had just enlisted. . . .

Q. Then most of your men who were left at home were what you call ineffectives ?

A. Yes."

The Secretary of State for War has described the situation in which we were during a critical period of the Boer War :—

"In May, 1900, there were 100,000 men of the Regular Army at home, but there was not one single efficient brigade, and scarcely enough artillery to make one properly organized brigade division. (A brigade division comprises three batteries or eighteen guns.)"—(H. O. Arnold-Forster, *The War Office, the Army, and the Empire.*)

Under the new scheme, if it becomes operative, we shall have, when we are not engaged in war abroad, a small, well-trained force of Regulars

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in this country to meet a possible raid¹ in addition to a large reserve of soldiers who have served two years and a body of sixty thousand highly trained Volunteers supported by a much larger force, which would be relied upon in war time "to come and fill up the Companies and make the thirty files sixty files." When we have a land campaign in progress abroad, "the defence of these islands against hostile raids must be left very largely to the Volunteers," because "it is the accepted policy of the Government that the Regular Army, *General and Home Service alike*, is maintained principally for service oversea." This is, perhaps the most serious statement in Mr. Arnold-Forster's speech, and it at once renders the efficiency and equipment of the Volunteer force a question of the first national importance.²

With regard to the second point I venture to commend to the attention of my readers the following remarks which Sir Ralph Knox, lately permanent Under-Secretary of State for War, included in his separate report on the Militia and Volunteers :—

"The real and only defence of an island power is its fleet ; it constitutes the first and second line of defence, and must be maintained at a paramount strength. Such a power must possess the command of the sea, for, without it, it is at the mercy of its enemies, even without a blow being struck ; and further, without the

¹ Mr. Arnold-Forster, in the course of his speech, said :—
"The Admiralty are of opinion that, while they cannot guarantee this country against raids, they can guarantee it against serious invasion."

² See page 203.

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command of the sea an island power is unable to use its military forces to deliver an attack beyond the sea which surrounds it.

“The position of this country differs so widely from that of Continental Powers that its military problem is totally dissimilar.

“In the progress, however, of a great war, history proves that it is not possible to foresee the military exigencies that may arise, and though, in our case, an invasion in force is not likely to be attempted, no Great Power, least of all one with hostages scattered all over the world, can feel satisfied unless its military strength is well developed.

“It cannot be denied, moreover, that *in the mind of some military authorities on the continent*, and also in that of many in this country, an invasion in force might be attempted, as it certainly has been threatened, even in the face of an overwhelming Navy. The existence of strong forces in this country would necessarily increase the dimensions of the force with which even the most reckless and fearless general would undertake the enterprise, and the greater the force the greater the certainty of its detection and destruction by the fleet.”—(Report, p. 49.)

At the same time, it would be folly to ignore the considerations expressed by the majority of Sir Ralph's fellow-commissioners in the following terms :—

“The perfection of the means of communication, and in foreign countries, of the control of the State over them, is such that the concentration of a large force at any port or ports is practicable within a very short time ; what was formerly a matter of weeks is now an affair of days, possibly even of hours.

“During the period in which Continental nations have re-created their military systems, changes not less important have taken place in the conditions of mari-

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time warfare. Movements by sea have become more rapid, more continuous, and more certain as regards time ; weapons have become more destructive. Naval warfare is always more concentrated and decisive than land warfare, and the effect of the developments just described is to intensify these characteristics, while, at the same time, the want of experience with the new instruments renders it difficult to predict the issue of a naval conflict. More is staked on a sea fight than ever, yet it is harder than ever to foresee the results which the destructive force of modern weapons may produce. The well-grounded confidence of our forefathers in their sailors and their wooden ships has happily been continued to the *personnel* of the modern British Navy, and to its battleships, cruisers and torpedo craft ; but it is impossible for us to shut our eyes to the fact that the next naval war in which this country may be engaged will be on both sides a great experiment." —(Report, pp. 2 and 3.)

If we lost command of the sea permanently, no Army raised by conscription or any other means could save us from starvation. But situations might arise in which an adequate land force at home would release the fleet for effective action in the right place.

It would be indeed a misfortune which no one wishes to anticipate if the Navy had to choose between offensive action at a distance, and the duty of home defence. But can we forget the worst danger which threatened us during the late war ? If the Government in Germany or France or America had yielded to popular sentiment—as a weak or foolish Government might have done—if there had been less mistrust between the Great

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Powers—if one had demanded our submission to arbitration, and another had joined in the game—if a coalition had been formed against us—what would have been the position of the fleet? Home defence and the absolute necessity of keeping open the sea lines of communication with our big force in South Africa, that it might be fed and served with ammunition, would have been the charges thrown on the sailors at a juncture when, perhaps, the distribution of ships required by these duties would have been fatal to effective naval attack on our part. What would have happened if the Admiralty had felt bound to try to stop the junction of two hostile fleets far away from our shores? What would have happened to our food supply if we had been threatened with a coalition in Europe and menaced simultaneously from the West? We do not care to recollect these things when the trouble has passed, but there was a heavy cloud in Venezuela not so many years ago.

Surely the lesson to be drawn from these considerations is that we must have a “free fleet.”

Moreover, an adequate land force might determine the ultimate result of a maritime war by preserving our naval bases from seizure by an invading force after an initial reverse at sea and the dispatch of a reinforcing squadron to a distance, or after a temporary loss of supremacy in home waters from any cause.

Personally, I doubt whether even the most astute foreign Government could organize a raid in force into this country with the swiftness and secrecy

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which the majority of the Duke of Norfolk's Commission seemed to think possible. A steamer is an expensive thing to buy. Its "life," as a valuable commercial asset, is usually only from fifteen to twenty years. Of course, it is always insured, and an ordinary insurance does not cover war risks. If a hostile Power arranged to gather together in a port or ports near our shores transport sufficient to carry an invading force with horses and *matériel*, I think that Lloyds, at all events, would be able to warn our Government at least a month in advance.

The carrying of horses involves structural alterations in the boats, which take time. If we had a month for preparation we *ought* to be in a position to repel the invaders.

However, these are matters for the naval expert. The great advantage aimed at by the reorganization of the Army which has now been undertaken is that the force at our disposal in future shall be *real*.

Nevertheless, it is a matter of certainty that time alone can show whether, under the new scheme, if it be given a full and fair trial, we shall be in a much better position a few years hence than we are now. From a speech recently made by Lord Lansdowne in the House of Lords it appears that the scheme presented by Mr. Arnold-Forster is only tentative and does not give the final opinions of the Government on the question of Army Reform. If this is so, it seems a pity that the scheme was produced at all, and it can only be regarded as a *ballon d'essai*. I should not wish to hurry the Government or the Ministers in charge. We have

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had bitter experience of over-hastiness in this matter and, of the birth of abortive proposals. It would be much better to take time and then produce a final and complete scheme. In any case—and upon this point I would lay especial stress—it is devoutly to be hoped that whatever system is now adopted, will be finally adopted, and that whatever changes of Government or public opinion take place, the Army will be given breathing time to realize where it is and will be allowed to develop steadily. These constant changes, this permanent uncertainty, the pulling up of plants to see how they are growing, is and must be disastrous.

The chief proposal of the Secretary of State's scheme, which is drastic and novel, is the reduction of the Militia. The other proposals, dealing with the terms of enlistment and service, are only such as have been made at any time during the last thirty years. It is evident that if Mr. Arnold-Forster had had a free hand he would have gone much farther in regard to the Militia than he has been able to do and would have abolished the force altogether. This would have been, in my opinion, a wise and important step in the right direction. Possibly the country is not ripe for it and clings to its old traditions with a touching if somewhat foolish fidelity.

It is difficult to compel the people generally to face facts, especially unpleasant facts. In this case the fact is that the Militia is a sham and delusion from beginning to end.¹ For the best officers and

¹ Major-General Borrett, the Inspector-General of Recruiting, said, in the course of his evidence before the Royal Commission on the War :—

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men composing the force it is merely a back-door to the regular army—and what remains of it when those men have passed that door is practically useless for any military purpose whatsoever, as the Duke of Norfolk's Commission pointed out. The sooner this disagreeable truth is admitted the better for the safety and the purse of the country. To abolish the Militia entirely would in no way weaken our powers of defence or offence ; it would clear the ground of one of those numerous forces with special conditions of service and special organization which merely serve to complicate our military

“ No line soldier was allowed to go and fight the Boers until he was twenty. Looking over the ages of the Militia, I was obliged to tell Lord Lansdowne, the Secretary of State, that if he adhered to nineteen I should lose one-third of my men. He agreed with me that that would not do, and he said that he should allow Militiamen to go out at eighteen ; *they enlist at seventeen*. By taking them at eighteen we only lost one-tenth of the men, whereas, had we gone to nineteen, we should have lost one-third of them, so that the order was given that Militiamen of eighteen were to be available to go, and, of course, it was all done by volunteering. . . .

Q. How do the Militia battalions stand in respect of officers ?

A. At the time the war broke out they were very short of officers. . . . Take the Royal Lancasters. Both Militia battalions went abroad, and they had only eight subaltern officers, when they ought to have had twenty-four. I was determined that no regiment should go out short either of men or officers, and I proceeded to fill them up in conjunction with the officers commanding regiments. . . . I used to see nearly all the young officers myself, and they were all ordinary educated young gentlemen, and in conjunction with the colonels of the regiments, I filled up the vacancies in the ranks of the officers. . . .

Q. They had no training connected with any Volunteer or Militia regiments ?

A. No ; none whatever. I saw them perhaps one day, and they embarked two days afterwards for South Africa, and they were gazetted afterwards as fast as I could, with no training at all.” (5255-58-59 ; 5322.)

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system without adding anything to its strength or efficiency as an engine of war. This multiplicity of forces has been and still is the great stumbling-block to any real measures of reform or of economy. The money wasted in paying for officers and men who are admittedly unfitted for active service is a serious matter,¹ but by no means the most serious evil. There is waste, too, in establishments and staffs, which have to be maintained in order to deal with different sets of regulations, rates of pay, pensions and so forth. But the real blot is that it is impossible to co-ordinate these different bodies of men into any coherent military whole. They are scattered about the country haphazard, without any scientific distribution—the individual units composing them vary as the poles in strength and efficiency, and to brigade, train or prepare them for war is a matter of utter impossibility.

It is abundantly clear that no merely superficial changes will ever remedy this state of things, and that the safety of the country and the Empire will only be secured when the people realize that they must make some personal sacrifice for the defence of their homes. There is no *insuperable* cause in operation to make a National Army for Home Defence more costly in this country than in others.

I quite recognize that in all probability no Government and no Ministers will ever be found to

¹ It should be remembered that, between 1895 and 1899, the nation spent upon the Army the sum of £99,478,838, and yet we were in every respect unready for the long-expected campaign against the Boer Republics.

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advocate any form of compulsion, and that it can only be brought about by a recognition on the part of the people generally of the dangers of their present situation. This, in turn, will only arrive with some great national peril, and then it may be too late.

Meanwhile the gratitude of the country is due to Mr. Arnold-Forster for his plain statement of the position in which we now are, for his exposure of the manifold weaknesses and anomalies in our military system, and for the attempt he is about to make to render the men and forces at our disposal as efficient as the circumstances of the case will permit. It is only the nation as a whole that can improve the circumstances.

I hope I may be forgiven for introducing a final quotation. The passage is taken from the evidence given by Lord Lansdowne before the Royal Commission on the War.

(*Sir Frederick Darley.*) "Is it your opinion that, taking all matters into consideration, including the natural disinclination of the Government to do anything which would precipitate war, at the time the war broke out you were, under all the circumstances of the case, sufficiently prepared for that war?—I do not think we were; I think the operations assumed proportions far in excess of anything we had ever professed to be prepared for.

"Who, would you say, was responsible for that—what department? Is it the country itself or Parliament?—The then Government and the Governments which preceded it, and Parliament, in so far as it determines the strength of the Army to be maintained and the amount of our military expenditure.

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“ In point of fact, it is the people themselves who were responsible for the non-preparation ?—I think you have had mentioned to you the often-quoted memorandum of Mr. Edward Stanhope, laying down that our organization was to proceed upon the basis of three Army Corps, of which two were to be composed of Regular troops ; that has been the accepted basis ever since Mr. Edward Stanhope’s time ; that basis has, I believe, been referred to in Parliament.

“ So that for the want of preparation, such as it was, it is really the people who are responsible through Parliament ?—You might put it in that way.

(*Sir John Jackson.*) “ In fact, the great disinclination of the House of Commons to vote money for war purposes until we are absolutely at war ?—I am not sure that I should put it entirely on that ; I think I should put it much more upon the fact that no one ever anticipated that we should ever have to send a field force of those dimensions out of this country at a few days’ notice.

“ But it is the case that for many past years there always has been a great disinclination to vote money for war purposes until we were absolutely at war, and then the country comes forward ?—I think that is true.”
(21417, *seq.*)

After the publication of the Report of the Royal Commission there was some talk of impeaching Lord Lansdowne. It will be seen that he had forestalled his accusers by indicting—in moderate and guarded terms—the nation itself. Can it fairly be said that he was quite without justification ?

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